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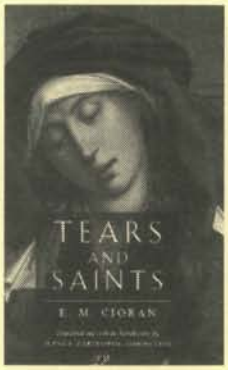

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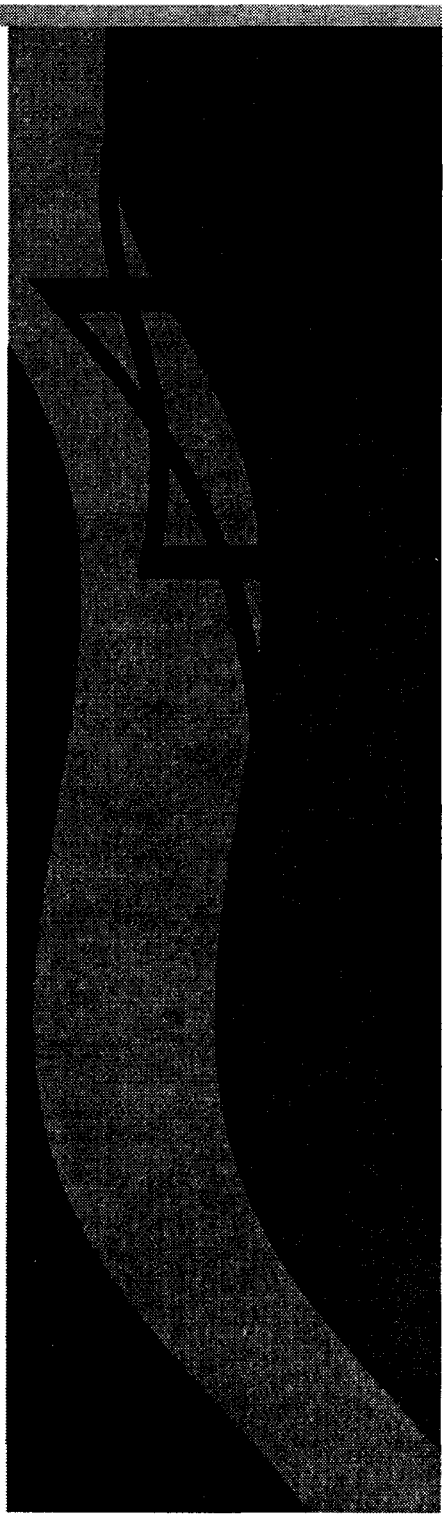

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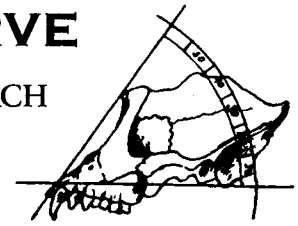

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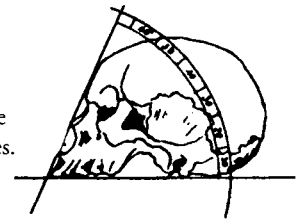

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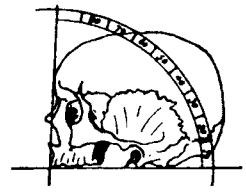

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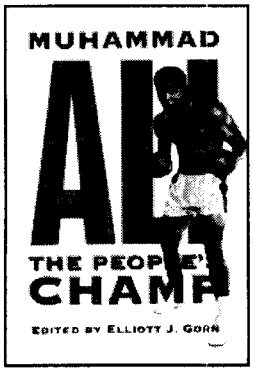

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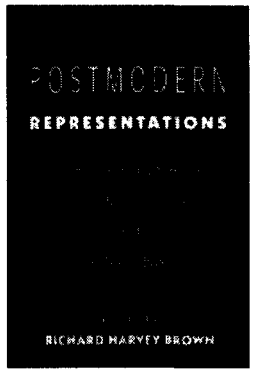

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Life and Letters

So to Speak

ARISTIDES

Finding that one has been walking around during a day full of crucial appointments unaware of the noticeable fleck of broccoli lodged between one's upper front teeth—that, roughly, is the despairing feeling that discovering one has been mispronouncing a word or a name gives. Only at the death of the Romanian writer E. M. Cioran did I learn that I had been mispronouncing his name over many years and before lots of students. I had always referred to him as *SEE-or-an*; in his obituary, I learned that it is properly pronounced *TCHAW*-rahn. For a good stretch, I didn't do much better with the Alexandrian poet C. P. Cavafy, whose name I pronounced *CAV-a-fee*, until a friend, who knew better, politely said, "I think it's *Ca-VA-fee*." As a mnemonic device he suggested I hum the tune "You're the kareem in my Ca-VA-fee."

Why does it feel so foolish, so ketchup on one's white shirtfront, so absolutely fly open at the senior prom, to know one has been mispronouncing a word? La Rochefoucauld may have supplied the answer when he noted that people would rather have their opinions questioned than their taste criticized. A mispronounced word or name has to be considered a lapse in taste, but, unlike normal poor taste, it is brought about by genuine ignorance. It also represents a self-puncturing of one's own pretensions, assuming one has any, and I happen to have quite a few.

When I first saw the word *banal*, I took to pronouncing it *BAY-nul*. I have long since switched to the more Frenchified *bu-NAHL*. Between *flutist* and *flautist*, I chose the latter, but only a few days ago I heard a woman with much greater musical culture than mine refer to a *flutist*, and I also found that H. W. Fowler, my household god in these and allied matters, also prefers *flutist*. Only moments before I taught a full course on the novels of Willa Cather did I learn that her name is pronounced to rhyme with *rather*. The other day I suggested to a woman that she might just have a Copernican complex—in which one believes that all the planets revolve around oneself—and I pronounced the word *Co-per-KNEE-can* (to rhyme with Puerto Rican), to which she replied that she always thought the word was pronounced *Co-PER-ni-can*—without, that is, the knee that I had placed in its stomach.

Until age eighteen, when I began college, pronunciation, speech, and language generally were not matters of any concern. I am an American, Chicago-born—that's *Shu-CAW-guh*, pal—and, like Mr. Augie March, I went at things my own way. I of course knew about the comedy of accents, especially the greenhorn accents of immigrants (radio shows and their characters, such as *The Life of Luigi*, Mr. Kitzel on *The Jack Benny Program*, and Mrs. Nussbaum on *The Fred Allen Show* emphasized the comic possibilities of butchered language). From the movies, I picked up the lovely lilting English accents of Ronald Coleman, Douglas Fairbanks, and Deborah Kerr and the elegantly alluring European-accented English of Ingrid Bergman, Sophia Loren, and Rossano Brazzi.

My own speech was without pretension. I wouldn't, frankly, have known to what to pretend. Nor was the speech of any of my classmates at all noteworthy. Among the kids with whom I grew up, there were no stutterers. I don't recall that we mispronounced any words in those days, though my range of words—apart from the standard boy's ample

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stock of profanity—was much less ornamental than it is now. I spoke freely and easily, full, I am sure, of every kind of error but that of self-consciousness.

Just about everyone I went to grade school with was in the same social class—lower-middle to middle. It was a less mobile America than we have now, and no one came from the east or the south or any other place where he or she might have picked up a regional accent (with one exception, a sweet-natured boy named Ben Rosenberg, a displaced person from Europe). Speech snobbery had not raised its stupid and largely disapproving head.

Only at university did pronunciation become a matter that required attention. I hadn't a clue about how to pronounce *Thucydides* the first time I saw it: *THUCK-a-dieds* may have been a first stab. English words of any complexity made me nervous. *Posthumous*, I recall, was among them; I kept seeing it as *post-humorous*, which the condition also is. Even the simplest French—about which more later—seemed surrounded by barbed wire and bear traps: I wasn't all that certain about knocking off the *s* in pronouncing *Camus*. I spent a fair amount of time as a college student disguising my ignorance.

But once I had determined to join the so-called educated classes, I had to take up the American version of what one Professor Henry Wyld, quoted in H. W. Fowler, calls "received pronunciation." By "received pronunciation," Wyld meant "the pronunciation of the great public schools, the universities and the learned professions, without local restriction." The sensible Fowler claimed that, in matters of pronunciation, "the right rule is to speak as our neighbors do, not better." The problem, though, is to establish in just which neighborhood one wishes to live. And this problem is compounded by that buzziest—not to say fuzziest—of all buzzwords, *elitism*.

Received pronunciation is that which is used by those who are deemed the best speakers among us. Who these might be is a question in the flux of controversy—with *controversy* pronounced, in the English way, with the accent on the second syllable: *con-TRAH-versy*. Irritating though it is to say so, I suppose that the "best" speech in America is made up of the amalgam of academic, broadcasting, and what remains of upper-class speech. It is an English accent without the mellifluousness, if you can fancy that.

English political power has more than dwindled, English quality in consumer goods seems largely a thing of the past, but American envy of the English accent has not much lessened. For a time in New York corporate life, having a secretary with an English accent was a perk for powerful executives. In academic life, an English accent, at the full-professor level, has been worth, by my estimate, an extra $10,000 to $30,000 in salary. There may not always be an England, but there always will be snobbery, and English speech, or at any rate the speech of southern England, continues to bang the snobbery gong.

The English have us doubly over the barrel in that they establish pronunciations that are even more arbitrary than ours. Some English pronunciations are merely more beautiful, owing to the sound of the vowel (the British short *a* instead of the American long *a* in *charade*) and the syllable that is accented (the last in *tirade* in England as opposed to the first in America); *lehzure* beats *leesure* all to hell, and so, for my money, does *DIN-asty* beat *DIE-nasty*."

Only fairly recently did I learn that in England the name Maurice is always pronounced *Morris*. (I suppose one ought to be grateful that Morris isn't in turn pronounced *Maurice*.) Many another English name gets its odd, less than logical twist. P. G. Wodehouse's name is pronounced *Woodhouse*. Christopher Isherwood used to pronounce Aldous Huxley's first name *ALL-deuce*. The novelist Anthony Powell can become a bit touchy, or so I have been informed, when Americans do not know that his last name is pronounced *POE-ul*. The star of *I, Claudius* prefers his name to be pronounced Derek *JAY-co-bee*, not *Ja-CO-bee*. I not long ago heard, on television, Clive James, an Australian, pronounce the word *urinals* as *your-EYE-nals*, which sounds a bit like a Swedish toast: In your eye, Nels. But, then, if *Cholmondeley* is pronounced as *Chumli* and *Magdalen* as *Maudlin* and *Caius* as *Keys*, all of which the English do, how is one to get one's bearings? Simple: if one is not English, one never does, quite.

Out for a drive one evening, a young daughter of friends earnestly inquired: "Why doesn't Mr. Aristides speak American?" She was, I take it, registering her mild astonish-

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ment at the hodgepodge accent I have apparently acquired over the past forty years since going off to college. What I hear in my own speech are a light New York accent, a slight whininess, and every so often an oddly over-pronounced patch, as if I am trying with my voice to supply lots of italics. An acquaintance not long ago told me that my pronunciation of the words *roof* and *root* identify me unmistakably as a middlewesterner, which was a setback. I used to do a respectable imitation of Elmer Fudd, and some days I wonder if I oughtn't to stick to it as my regular way of talking and let it go at that.

Some words I regularly forget how to pronounce, possibly because their exact spelling slips my mind: *incunabula* is one. (Who was it that said that spelling is to pronunciation as reading is to writing?) There are other words that I wish I could say all the time because they are such a pleasure to sound out. *Deliquescent* is such a word. *Excursuses* is a word I would find amusing to say, though I don't think I've ever said it. *Post-exilic* is the only *post-* word that lights my fire; and *Eliotic* seems to me pretty nice, too. I do believe I would enjoy saying *Antiochenes, Diodorus,* or *Cassiodorus of Helicarnassus* but shall probably never have the occasion. A name I do have occasion to say, whose mere utterance gives me pleasure, is Arnaldo Dante Momigliano—a name to which, with another two or three syllables added, one can almost dance.

I once knew a pleasant fellow who pronounced Dostoyevsky's name *Dos-TOR-ev-sky,* but I hadn't the heart to correct him. *Proust* is a name that seems to give people trouble; and many who have not heard it said tend to pronounce it *Prowst.* People seem to have a tough time, too, with *Turgenev* and *Nabokov.* It took me a long while to remember to put the accent on the second syllable: *Tur-GAY-nyef* and *Na-BO-kov. Nietzsche* is another notable elocutionary hurdle. The tendency of the under-confident is to mutter "Nitsey" or "Nitsky" and play on through.

As a schoolteacher, I feel a part of my job is to correct the faulty pronunciations of my students. I do not do so gleefully. Actually, I do not do so at all, at least not directly. I know it would have wounded me when I was young to have been publicly corrected. If, say, the word *assuaged* is pronounced *ass-WAGED* early in the class, I make a note to reuse it later in the hour and give it the full-fathom-five French, *uh-SWAHGED.* I do the same, of course, with other shaky or plain wrong pronunciations: Evelyn Waugh's first name pronounced as if it were the standard female name (*EH-VE-LYN*), for example, instead of *EVE-lyn.* Whether my students pick up on this, I am not at all certain.

Mispronunciation can lead prettily into malapropism. "I want to buy kike," the Russian-born Tatiana Liberman is supposed to have said, when she meant *kite.* A friend reports that he regularly hears the phrase "take it for granite," though I have not heard it myself. Another friend tells me that at his health club he has heard the treadmill machine referred to as the "thread mill." The confusion between *prostate* and *prostrate* generally gets as good a workout as the thread mill. "Strike while the metal is warm," Inspector Poirot says. "All the money's in egg roll," an immigrant woman noted, when reporting that her husband's will was going through probate; that she didn't top it off by saying "going through prostate" is a shame.

I feel nothing but sympathy for those who have to learn English in mid-life. The barriers to mastering the language, at any rate in its spoken version, are impossibly high. In English, as Fowler notes, there are six different ways to pronounce *al-* followed by a consonant, and no fewer than nine different ways of pronouncing *-ough:* as in bough, though, cough, rough, through, ought, hough, lough, borough. Fowler adds that hiccough might be a tenth if it weren't a misspelling.

I have European friends of great brilliance who have become masters of English prose but who, after decades in this country, still struggle with the language as it is mysteriously spoken. I remember a lunch with two friends—one a Romanian mathematician, the other a Czech literary critic—who described their terror (the exact word they used) when they found out they would have to learn English.

What, I ask myself, would I do if forced to survive in Hungary—Hungarian, I am told, being a notably difficult language? The first thing I would do, I suspect, is cease laughing at a story I was recently told about the Hungarian-born Arthur Koestler playing Scrab-

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ble. In this game, Koestler set out five letters that hooked up with three other longish words, all with lots of *q*'s and *x*'s and *z*'s, thus giving him a vast quantity of points. The five letters formed the word *vinch.* As Koestler was happily counting up the points he had scored, an embarrassed silence gripped the three other players, one of whom was his English wife. "Darling," she said, with some hesitation, "are you quite certain that this is a word?" "Of course, Angel," Koestler is said to have replied. "You know, *vinch,* Angel, to shrink from or recoil, as if from a blow."

Vladimir Nabokov, who himself spoke English with an international accent and a universal understanding of puns, took on the subject of the nightmare of the foreigner having to negotiate the world in English in his novel *Pnin.* In this novel the English word doesn't exist for which the Russian émigré Professor Timofey Pavlich Pnin cannot find a mispronunciation. "If his Russian was music," Nabokov writes, "his English was murder." Larynx, tongue, lips, and soft palate all conspire in poor Pnin to make every word so *diffishool. Whiskey and soda,* for Pnin, come out *viscous and sawdust, afternoon* as *afternun,* the name *Thayer* as *Fire,* and *catastrophe* as *cata-stroph.* Nabokov's is a heart-crushing story that makes one realize how absolutely cut adrift one is from friendship, from society, from reality itself without control over language. I can, as the psychobabblists say, identify; in fact, I "vinch" at the mere thought.

Joseph Conrad, in spoken English, came closer to Professor Pnin than to his creator. Everyone who met the great novelist noted the rough quality of his spoken English; the discrepancy between it and his beautifully written English was too obvious to go without mention. The sculptor Jacob Epstein, who did a bust of Conrad, wrote in his autobiography: "At a few of the sittings Conrad dictated letters to the secretary. His English was strongly foreign with a very guttural accent, so that his secretary frequently failed to get the right word, which made Conrad growl." In his story "Amy Foster," Conrad dealt with the awfulness of being a foreigner, whose language renders him even more a stranger, and with the loneliness and despair that can result. The story is about a castaway whose "quick, fervent utterance positively shocked everybody" and left him like "a man translated into another planet, . . . separated by an immense space from his past and by an immense ignorance from his future." There can be little doubt that the psychological provenance for this story was in Joseph Conrad's own struggles with spoken English.

Like most Americans, I am without any gift for speaking another language. I could, I suppose, hide behind George Bernard Shaw's probably self-justifying remark that anyone who has a lot to say in his own language hasn't got time to master a foreign one. But the truth is that I should be pleased to speak foreign languages for all sorts of reasons, among which is the prospect of hiding out mentally every now and then in another language.

I would have thought that mastering foreign accents would not have posed any great difficulty for me. As a perhaps too indefatigable teller of jokes, I am a pretty fair mimic: I do Englishmen, Australians, Irishmen, East Indians, Germans, Mexicans, Italians, and the Jews in a thousand voices. I have a modest Yiddish vocabulary. I read French, though never without the aid—increasingly more necessary—of a dictionary. I once thought that I was picking up Italian but discovered that I had acquired only enough to get on the wrong train to Milan. Late for my plane, I had to pay an Italian cabdriver eighty dollars to speed out to the Milan airport. On the way we spoke about Frank Sinatra in our equally atrocious French.

Many people learn foreign languages through necessity: émigrés, people from what I think of as lesser-known-language countries (Romania, the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc.). Some people have the sweet gift of easily acquiring speaking knowledge of foreign languages. In Cathleen Schine's novel *Rameau's Niece,* the heroine's husband knows "seven languages, and accepted with only the poorest grace that he could speak just one of them at a time." Just how many polyglots walk the streets is apparently a matter of some dispute. My guess is that there are not all that many such characters around.

John Weightman, the excellent English critic of French writing, thinks that "monolingualism may well be the norm for the human mind." He goes on to report that he has heard "bilingual or trilingual colleagues

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complain of uncertainty about their personal identity through the conflicting pulls of two or more linguistic atmospheres." If true, this, to people locked in my monolingual condition, is news comparable to that of learning that the very rich are all desperately unhappy.

I should still someday like to be able to speak Italian, the babbling of whose words gives such musical pleasure. Is it, by the way, the Tower of long *a* or short *a* Babel? I must find out for certain right after I learn whether *Hiro-SHE-ma* or *Hir-O-shima* is correct. Then I must go back to check the correct pronunciation of the name of the Russian writer Isaac Babel.

I have sent up the white flag on ever speaking French with ease and confidence. I used to half claim that I could speak French through little demonstrations of false modesty. "Do I speak French?" I would say when asked. *"Je parle français comme une vache espagnol."* Or I would suggest that, in French, I sound something like this: "Excuse me, boody boy, but maybe for me the time you can tell?" In fact, I don't believe my French sounds quite that good. Certainly, it isn't that fluent.

In his essay "On Speaking French," Max Beerbohm publicly confesses to a fraudulence similar to my own. He, too, would modestly claim his French was wretched, allowing his was "French *pour rire.*" Because of his general impeccability, it was assumed that Max had perfect French, and so at dinner parties he was not infrequently seated next to French guests. He recounts one such occasion when a French woman launched a fusillade of (to him) perfectly incomprehensible French, to which he responded with his usually successful riposte of "*C'est vrai.*" Only later did he learn that the woman was asking him who among the young French novelists the English critics thought important, and she had to admit her surprise at never having heard of this fellow Sévré.

"To be shamed as a talker is bad enough," Max notes; "it is even worse to be shamed as a listener." Although I think I have a decent ear, I, too, don't really hear French very well. The soft stress the French put on their syllables and the tricks that elision plays cause spoken French ultimately to elude me. Max Beerbohm, who rightly says that French is a more elegant written language than Italian, compares spoken Italian to a violin and spoken French to a flute. To most foreign ears, he adds, English has "a rather harsh sound" (a kazoo, perhaps?).

In my car, I have been listening to a tape of the immensely cheering songs of Charles Trenet, but I pick up only words *(fenêtre, bonheur, printemps)*, sometimes phrases *(que rest-à-t'il, le soleil et la lune, il pleut dans ma coeur)*, but, alas, I cannot put an entire lyric together. How I wish I could, so that I could join the old boy in, say, his rousing rendition of "La Mer" while spinning down the Outer Drive, my own *mer*, Lake Michigan, on my right. Sometimes I join him by substituting the title "My Hair" and make up lyrics of my own.

My own mistakes in pronouncing French words that everyone else seems confident about continue to crop up. I have only very recently discovered that the *s* in the name of the extravagantly expensive French shop Hermès is indeed to be pronounced. I remain edgy about attempting those French words or names with lots of vowels: Pouilly-Fuissé, Marie-Laure de Noaille, *gouailleuse.* Odgen Nash wrote a poem about nobody being able to pronounce the name Saint-Saëns correctly; I wish he had written others about the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe and the composer Ernö von Dohnányi.

Edmund Wilson, a bull in many china shops, is said to have taken himself by the horns and pronounced French with no regard for its silent letters, elisions, or any other of its fundamental rules of pronunciation. This is certainly one method, the Wilson method, of speaking French: just not giving a damn about how you sound. Another is to treat the entire question of French pronunciation as comedy. The novelist Josephine Herbst, friends of hers have told me, always deliberately pronounced the word *milieu* as *ma-LOO*, which I of late have taken to doing, if only to deflate some of the pretentiousness implicit in an English speaker using the word.

Two recent books by Americans, one a Francophile, the other a recently converted Francophobe, convince me that learning to speak French well is probably a hopeless project and one I should probably cease even fantasizing about. In *French Lessons*, Alice Kaplan recounts an almost lifelong engage-

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ment with French. As a girl, she went off to French summer camp in Maine where campers were given *mauvais points* for reverting to English, she attended school in Switzerland, and she later spent long stretches in France. She explains how long it took her to master the pronunciation of the French *r*. When she finally achieved it, with the aid of something called the Capretz Method, it was, evidently, one of the great moments in her life: Catharsis! Eureka! The earth shook.

An academic, a teacher of French language and literature at Duke University, Miss Kaplan also recounts the unending pressure that American teachers of French are under lest they make a mistake—assigning the wrong gender to a noun, say—before their French-born colleagues. "There is invariably trouble," she writes, "when a tyrannical or insensitive native speaker rules over a department where all the assistant professors are Americans, forever on guard against the telling mistake that might cost them a promotion." An important American critic of French literature, whom Miss Kaplan doesn't name, likes to "tell how he was denied tenure at another elite college because of his French *r*, which smelled of New Jersey."

A scholar specializing in Descartes, a middlewesterner, a man with a white beard, Professor Richard Watson, who is thoroughly at ease with French on the page, was invited to give a paper on Descartes in French in France. He knew his spoken French to be wanting and so decided that, before giving his paper, he ought to put himself through a course of instruction in spoken French, which he did, during a sabbatical year, at the Alliance Française in Paris. There this highly intelligent American academic, owing to his inability to get his mouth to form many of the subtler French sounds or his ear to hear the cascades of the language pouring from his indifferent instructors' lips, sadly failed his course.

The experience, as we *Americaines* say, has left Professor Watson steamed. No doubt a translator into French would make this phrase ". . . has left Professor Watson drycleaned." The novelist Louis Begley, going over a French translation of one of his novels, discovered one of his characters waiting at the curb for a large lemonade, and, unable to remember having written this, he returned to his English text where he discovered he had originally written that his character was awaiting "a stretch limo." Seeking vengeance, for him a dish best served hot, Watson attacks French pedagogy, the French people, the snobbery and inconsideration he feels inherent in so much teaching of French. But his real rage is against the French language itself.

In *The Philosopher's Demise*, his book on attempting to learn to speak French, Watson concludes that, while he loves to read French and especially to read French philosophers, he intensely dislikes the sounds of spoken French. The French, he avers, can't even swear properly, *mon Dieu!* He carries on amusingly about the awfulness of the word *l'oiseau*: "It cannot be pronounced without simpering," one cannot say it without making a prissy face, no, it is quite unspeakable. There is something amusing about watching a man rail against an entire language—at least at its spoken version—that is, if you have a taste for watching a grown man fighting a Bozo doll that keeps popping back up at him.

Enjoying Richard Watson's scorched-earth attack on the French language has not cured me of my longing to be impeccably correct, beautifully precise, absolutely fluent in French. Even though French no longer dominates diplomacy, commerce, or anything else, except perhaps international snobbery, I am still hostage to the notion that an educated person ought to be able to speak the language with ease. Hostage, however, I shall remain. Perhaps in the next life I shall speak perfect French; then, too, many say that French is likely to be the official language of hell. A rumor has it that, for their snobbery about their own language, a number of neighborhoods in hell have been set aside especially for the French, where they will be allowed to hear only Americans confidently mispronouncing their language.

In this life, meanwhile, there remains the continuing work of mispronouncing English, a nearly full-time job in itself. Take the often awkward matter of names. Correct pronunciation of so many names simply cannot be known until one hears them pronounced by someone else. For nearly everyone whose name ends in *stein*, for example, there is the great *steen* or *styne* problem. The origin of the

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difficulty is the anti-German feeling in the United States during World War I that caused many people with *stein* in their names to give it the less-Germanic-sounding pronunciation *steen*. In later years, Leonard Bernstein, going the other way, insisted on a *styne* ending for his own name.

Some mispronunciations are charming. Winston Churchill pronounced *Nazi* as if it rhymed with *snazzy*, and, as far as I am concerned, he was richly entitled to do so, having defeated them. Sam Weller, in *Pickwick Papers*, pronounces all his *w* words with a *v* sound, which gives him, a charming man to begin with, added charm. Yet certain simple mispronunciations set my teeth, as Professor Pnin might say, on ledge. I used to teach J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, and inevitably some students would pronounce Mill's name *Mills*. Mill is a simple enough name—as well as a famous one—and they ought to get it right, damn it. I came to believe dogmatically that anyone who mispronounced Mill's name had no hope of ever understanding him. I'm afraid that I still believe that.

Possibly the J. S. Mill screwups are connected with a propensity I have noticed on the part of people to botch simple, four-letter names. In the army, two of my friends were Dick Delp (rhymes with *yelp*) and John Fike (rhymes with *Mike*). Everyone seemed to want to call Delp "Delph," "Delt," or "Dorph"; he was lucky, I suppose, that the slang word *dork* had not yet come into being. Had they the foresight, his parents probably should have changed the family name to Delphi. As for Fike, everyone called him either "Fink" or "Fikey"; no one, so far as I know, ever called him "Fichte," but then the sergeants I came across in Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas tended to be notably weak in German philosophy.

English pronunciation seems to be especially difficult for Germans. I read the other day that Thomas Mann, as intellectually sophisticated as he was, used to pronounce *movies* as *moovings*. The German professor sputtering his way through English was a stock bit for Sid Caesar and other comics. It had its source in reality. I once sat in a meeting next to the Austrian-born conductor and opera director Kurt Herbert Adler, as Viennese a gent as one might imagine, who whispered something to me of which I could make out only what I thought was the word *lozenges*. As it happened, I had a package of LifeSavers in my pocket and promptly offered him one. "No, no, no," he protested. "I zed Los Ang-elees."

My using that "zed" reminds me that I don't much care for fiction that makes fun of regional or foreign accents by using phonetic spellings. Only Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Finley Peter Dunne, Ring Lardner, and Rudyard Kipling seem to get away with it—but even their work doesn't always avoid giving the sheer irritation that deciphering phonetic spelling exacts. On the other hand, the real thing, actual unconventional speech in real life, served up in unreceived pronunciation, is almost always a delight. I enjoy regional accents, affected pronunciation, and almost all speech that comes, so to say, with a twist.

I also enjoy people who toss an extra syllable or two into their pronunciation. Kenneth Tynan, in his days as a drama reviewer, remarked of the performance of Donald Wolfit in a Shakespeare play that it was worth seeing "if only to hear Mr. Wolfit giving the hapless word 'Nature' its full eight or nine syllables." Stendhal is said to have pronounced *logique* with three syllables. I have heard certain Reform rabbis give the word *Israel* what seemed like twelve or thirteen syllables. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson said that he had heard that the philosopher C. E. M. Joad had discovered God and imagined he pronounced His name with a soft *g* and a long *o*.

Owing possibly to television, regional accents may be slowly disappearing. I have students from southern states who speak without clearly discernible southern accents. New York accents—"I've an idear. Why don't we get a vodker?"—seem on the wane. Mary Cantwell, in a recent memoir, refers to a Connecticut accent entailing a strangling of vowels that she calls "Locust Valley Lockjaw," and she distinguishes it from the West Hartford accent; from her days working on women's fashion magazines, she also mentions café-society snarls and "well-syllabled women." I imagine those women as in the room they come and go, talking of Michelangelo, in T. S. Eliot's poem, as extremely well syllabled.

For my money, you can't cut these things

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too fine. The more accents, oddities, goofinesses, the better. I believe I can distinguish a North from a South Carolina accent. A Boston Irish accent seems to me a fine thing. I am also partial to Maine accents. The old Chicago working-class accent—*dese, dem,* and *dose* for *these, them,* and *those*—is less in evidence than formerly. No one can say that it ever hurt anyone's career, at least not in Chicago politics. It was the accent of the late Mayor Daley, and it still creeps into the speech of his son, the current Mayor Daley. One of the things that make California less interesting is that it has produced no distinctive language, unless you count psychobabble.

The sheer delight of pronunciation in and for itself ought not to be overlooked. Splendid pronunciation, as Kenneth Tynan once noted, "demonstrates command: the ability to make words perform for you, skip, leap and gyrate, or, in Max Beerbohm's phrase, 'tread in their presence, like kings, gravely.'" As a drama critic, Tynan was finely attentive to pronunciation. He once criticized Peggy Ashcroft, performing the part of a Chinese woman in the Brecht play *The Good Woman of Setzuan,* for her "telltale Kensington vowels." He found another actor, Clive Brook, able to suggest "centuries of decadence behind every syllable he utters." He praised the technical versatility of Danny Kaye's voice, noting that "fastidiousness gleams blindingly in his sheer power of pronouncing." Hermione Gingold, "the best female impersonator of our time," had a voice that "is a delectable plummy rasp, emerging from her as from a cement mixer." He loved Maurice Chevalier, not least for the delicious way he mangled English: a love affair, in the French singer's version, was "churst worn of thoz krezzy theengs."

Perhaps Kenneth Tynan admired elocutionary achievement to the extent he did because he was himself, at least early in life, a horrendous stutterer. A journalist named Alan Brien once wrote about Tynan's own speech that "the stutter starts as a nervous spasm in the solar plexus and leaps to jaw muscles . . . then he will make four or five snapping sounds like a man taking quick bites from an apple and produces a long balanced sentence in which pun cannons into pun in a verbal break at billiards." That is very good—perhaps too good. But it does remind one of how serious would be the deprivation of the pleasures of easy pronunciation.

For a piece of journalism, I once attempted to interview a six-foot-eight-inch forward for the Chicago Bulls named Bob Love, who stuttered so badly that a true interview wasn't really possible. Bob Love couldn't communicate; instead he could make the most delicate, dead-on jump shots I have ever seen. All poor Ken Tynan could do was write some of the most consistently interesting prose of his time. Compensation, you might say, sometimes has its compensations.

The more one thinks about it, the more pronunciation itself seems "churst worn of thoz krezzy theengs." Our way of pronouncing is in good part set by our environment: by family, region, friends, education. Yet much room exists to remake ourselves in the way we wish to seem by remaking the way we pronounce words. To sound tough, refined, elegant, confident, yes, even natural—"People don't understand," Ravel once complained, "I am naturally artificial"—these are only a few of the multitude of choices pronunciation makes available.

Which brings me to what I have been told was Ira Gershwin's favorite story. It has to do with a young woman trying out for a Gershwin musical. On the audition stage she announces that she would like to sing a song from a Gershwin musical and goes promptly into "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off." In singing "You say either, I say either, you say neither, I say neither . . . " she pronounces all the *either*s, the *neither*s, the *tomatoe*s, the *potatoe*s exactly the same. Presently, the casting director calls out: "That will do. Thank you Miss Le-VEEN, thank you very much. We'll be in touch with you, Miss Le-VEEN." Gathering up her music, she looks out into the seats. "Oh, by the way," she says, "the name is pronounced Le-VINE."

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What Do We Know About Intelligence?

LINDA S. GOTTFREDSON

THE TECHNIQUES, TOOLS, AND THEORIES of the study of intelligence undergird efforts to improve instruction, job training, and productivity as well as to diagnose and treat mental retardation, psychopathology, and school failure. The field's major product, the mental test, was often adopted early in the century, in Great Britain, for example, with the aim—and subsequent effect—of increasing educational opportunities for talented but less privileged youth.

According to the most vocal lay opinion today, however, the research on intelligence is "ideologically motivated," "mean-spirited," "bogus, nineteenth-century pseudo-science" bent on preserving social inequity. Basic conclusions are asserted to be their opposites, and acknowledged giants are depicted as fringe figures, while their long-discredited critics are lauded as mainstream thinkers.

These attacks on the study of intelligence, while often motivated by a strong democratic passion, are, at bottom, attacks on the successes of American democracy itself. As inequalities owing to such factors as bias and social advantage are eliminated in American society, inequalities owing to genetic factors increasingly stand out. The more social conditions become alike, the more genetic differences become the only differences. Intelligence is, of course, only one important difference and is itself both partly genetic and partly environmental in origin.

But just as equality of social condition strips away the importance of class and caste in developing and using natural talents, technological advance adds to the relative importance of intelligence in economic and social life. In less complex societies, people may get rather far on traits such as physical prowess and the sheer willingness to work hard. High intelligence, however, becomes an ever greater asset

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in a technological age, which increasingly requires and rewards quick learning and keen thinking. Paradoxically, then, the democratic effort to expunge the advantages of social origin gives greater weight to genetic differences in intelligence, and technology further augments their importance. Democracy does not eliminate social hierarchy but only shifts its basis from the conventional toward the genetic, especially the genetic differences in intelligence.

Rather than see this problem as a paradox endemic to democracy, many people have blamed the science that reveals it. Critics accuse scholars who study intelligence of preferring and creating the inequalities that modern democracy itself produces. As the scientific data have accumulated in recent decades and confirmed the paradox, so too have these critics' responses become more impassioned and shrill. Clearly, the data on intelligence touch a sensitive nerve.

Impressive evidence of media misrepresentation of the data on intelligence comes from the 1988 book *The IQ Controversy, the Media, and Public Policy* by Mark Snyderman and Stanley Rothman. Their large survey of IQ experts and journalists disclosed that the two groups held opposing views about basic findings—for example, about whether mental tests are culturally biased and whether race and class differences in IQ are solely environmental in origin. Snyderman and Rothman showed that news coverage in the major newspapers and news magazines reflected not the experts' views but primarily the journalists' contrary ones. The divergence between the two groups could not be traced to ideology, because the IQ experts were as left-liberal on the average as were the journalists. Like the journalists, most of the experts on intelligence favored strong affirmative-action measures and believed that American exploitation has contributed to Third World poverty.

Media portrayals of scientific knowledge on intelligence have not changed much for several decades. Public controversy over intelligence in the late 1960s drove many researchers out of the field and led most of the rest to be very cautious about voicing their opinions outside their specialties. A high wall developed around the subject, reinforced from both within and without, behind which researchers have worked warily for three decades. Research on intelligence has been effectively walled off, not only from the public, but also from the other social sciences. This barrier within the academy itself has meant that many of the social sciences, particularly sociology, anthropology, and education, have now miseducated generations of college students on those questions and problems having to do with issues of intelligence. This isolation has meant that the science has moved

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relentlessly forward while public perceptions have remained frozen in the 1960s.

Striking evidence of how wide the gulf between public and scientific understanding has become emerged during the public debate over Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve.* Critics often dismiss the book as reflecting an ideologically motivated rehash of discredited notions that are out of step with modern psychological science: a "disingenuous," "anachronistic Social Darwinism," and "manifesto of conservative ideology," according to Stephen Jay Gould. For some, the book's key error is to claim that intelligence exists or, if it does, that it can be measured. Others argue that intelligence exists but does not measure anything very important. Some agree that it is important but that the races do not differ. And yet others agree that the races do differ, but it is misleading to say so because, in their view, intelligence is highly malleable. These mistaken claims are not new, but experts on intelligence have been astonished at the escalating degree and rancor of the discussion.

In response, more than fifty leading scholars of intelligence and allied fields published a statement last December ("Mainstream Science on Intelligence," that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* of December 13, 1994) laying out twenty-five basic conclusions that they consider squarely within the mainstream of expert thinking. Simply stated, they concluded that differences in intelligence among individuals are real, can be measured accurately, and are important in school, work, and other of life's arenas. Disparities among races and social classes are also real, can be measured without bias, and are often important in social life. The sources of individual (and class) differences are known to be both environmental and genetic, but we have not yet discovered how to manipulate the environment to raise intelligence permanently. Average differences between racial groups are suspected, but not proven, to be both environmental and genetic in origin. They, too, have thus far resisted remediation.

Hardly bold or controversial within the field, these conclusions can be found in good psychology textbooks on intelligence, such as Nathan Brody's 1992 volume *Intelligence.*

I think that individual differences in intelligence, as assessed by standardized tests, relate to what individuals learn in schools and to their social mobility. And I think that scores on such tests are related, albeit weakly related, to race and social class background. In addition, I think we do not know how to substantially modify or eliminate individual differences in intelligence or the relationship between individual differences in intelligence and what is learned in schools. As long as this is true, individual differences in intelligence will relate to important social outcomes.

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My point here is not that these basic conclusions are surely correct because most researchers of intelligence agree with them, but simply that they have become the views of the mainstream in the study of intelligence.

These are not conclusions that those who study intelligence wished to draw, but in fact they are ideas that many tried vigorously yet unsuccessfully to disprove. The first and very lively contest among pioneers in the then young study of intelligence, continuing well past mid-century, concerned whether there even exists a general mental ability as distinct from multiple, unrelated abilities. In another heated debate, a large cadre of IQ researchers in the 1960s and 1970s made concerted efforts to prove mental tests culturally biased. Ironically, it was the very vigor of attempts to disprove the reality and importance of general intelligence that in the end so clearly proved both.

Nathan Brody speaks for many in the field when he writes, in the preface to his textbook on intelligence, "If the world were as I would like it to be, what I think I have learned about intelligence would not be true." His motivation for delving into the field had been "a desire to demonstrate that [Arthur] Jensen was wrong." I suspect he also speaks for many when he describes his own lost egalitarian utopia.

> Children would be equally capable of learning and everyone would be well educated. Differences in status associated with different occupations would be minimized or eliminated. Individual differences, in whatever would be analogous to intelligence in such a world, would be of little relevance.

Many Americans have apparently assumed that almost everyone is talented in some notable way or else that talent is randomly distributed. Either circumstance, if true, would seem to impede development of any social hierarchy in a society emphasizing individual merit. Success and failure in such a system would be random with regard to both social class and racial background, thus minimizing invidious comparisons across groups. The common fear, implied in Brody's utopia, is that there exists a cognitive hierarchy that has biological roots and portends people's fates.

Research in intelligence excites fear by refuting the egalitarian presumptions about intelligence. It confirms that there are indeed many kinds of measurable talent, but that only some—and especially intelligence—seem to be of substantial social and economic importance in the modern world. It also reveals that such capabilities are not randomly distributed across families or social groups; nor are they entirely environmental in origin.

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Americans have always prided themselves in repudiating Old World aristocracies and urging meritocracy instead. The nation's founding principles, by emphasizing individual freedom, promised to release individuals from the bondage (and advantage) of lineage to pursue their fortunes by dint of their own abilities and efforts. The current paradox is that social distinctions are not eradicated but rather in some sense replaced under a meritocracy. Intellectual advantage replaces social privilege in the competition to get ahead.

With technological progress, the need for intelligence only increases. As U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich summed it up in his book *The Work of Nations*, the new economy puts a higher premium on "brains" and "the capacity for abstraction" than did the old. The information age creates a demand for more "symbolic analysts." Unskilled and even semi-skilled work continue to disappear; there is less use for workers carrying out narrow, routine, repetitive, and predictable sets of tasks that are either easily accomplished with the new technologies or shipped overseas. As the new economy advances, the fortunes of the brightest rise yet higher, while those of the least bright fall further back. This specter of social bifurcation is by now familiar and has been set out in national reports from *A Nation at Risk* to *Workforce 2000.*

It is not surprising that Americans in particular would want to deny such side effects in fostering equal opportunity and technological advance. As Tocqueville recognized early in our history, we have a taste for liberty but a passion for equality.

> For equality, [Americans'] passion is ardent, insatiable, incessant, invincible: they call for equality in freedom; and if they cannot obtain that, they still call for equality in slavery. They will endure poverty, servitude, barbarism,—but they will not endure aristocracy.

The cognitive elite looks to be the new aristocracy.

What, then, does the research tell us—and not tell us—about differences in intelligence and their implications in social life? What are the realities? I consider recent developments on these matters in order to answer three general questions: What is intelligence? What creates differences in intelligence? How important are these differences in practical affairs?

What is intelligence? In everyday life we commonly refer to one another as smart or dumb, quick or slow, bright or dull, reflecting a uni-dimensional view of intelligence. The truth of that uni-dimensional view was the first hotly debated question in the study of intelli-

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gence early in the century. The question has now been settled to the satisfaction of most researchers who study intelligence.

Advances in factor analysis have confirmed that there is one highly general factor; it is referred to as *g* (for the general mental ability factor). This can be derived from any large, diverse battery of mental tests and is also measured reasonably well by simple IQ scores on a standard test. Most researchers now use the concept *g* rather than intelligence because it is more precise and carries less emotional baggage.

By no means is *g* the only mental ability, but it is the most general and is thought to have the largest overall effect throughout social and economic life. It also turns out to be the major component of tests for more specific abilities, such as verbal and spatial aptitude, despite earlier attempts to expunge it from such tests. In particular, the factor-analytic tradition in mental testing, synthesized in John B. Carroll's *Human Cognitive Abilities: A Survey of Factor-Analytic Studies*, has confirmed a hierarchical (branching) model of mental abilities, ranging from the most general (*g*) at the apex to increasingly numerous and specific abilities at successively lower levels in the hierarchy. (Carroll has an article forthcoming in the journal *Intelligence* that disputes Stephen Jay Gould's long-discredited criticisms of factor-analytic *g*.)

Factor analysis clarifies the outward manifestations, not the inner workings, of intelligence. Nonetheless, those outward indicators disclose the one fact most critical so far in understanding the practical importance of *g*. The essence of *g* seems to be the ability to deal with complexity, regardless of the specific content to be mentally manipulated (symbols or shapes, science or social studies, books or tools). This essence is best reflected in such mental matters as abstract thinking, problem solving, and the ability to learn quickly and effectively. In other words, *g* is the general capacity one has for comprehending one's environment and figuring out how to deal with it.

Two lines of research have investigated the inner workings of intelligence during the last few decades. Both involve laboratory inquiry into the nature of information processing. The more recent line of research tends to be biological and reductionist because it concentrates on speed and accuracy of processing exceedingly simple stimuli (lights, tones, lines, and the like). The second approach, which emerged in the 1970s from the cognitive science revolution in psychology, favors the study of more complex processes (such as sustaining attention, classifying words, and mentally rotating shapes).

The former tends to reflect the "bottom-up" view that differences in higher level processes result from differences in the most elemen-

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tal ones, which in turn may originate in neurological structures. The latter approach usually reflects the opposite or "top-down" view, which emphasizes cognitive strategies or "metacognition" and their susceptibility to experience and instruction. The former approach tends to view mental processing on the analogy of computer hardware and the latter on that of computer software.

Both approaches debate whether *g* is a unitary mental process rather than a composite of several independent ones. Each has developed ingenious ways to parse different mental processes (see, for example, the journal *Intelligence* and handbooks and compendia by Douglas Detterman, Robert Sternberg, Philip A. Vernon, and Benjamin Wolman). Both approaches correlate differences in people's cognitive processing (its accuracy, speed, consistency) with their IQ scores in order to determine how many and which processes might be sufficient to account for differences in *g*. Both have found processes that correlate with IQ, some quite substantially, but neither has yet been able to account fully for IQ differences, either in a statistical or causal sense.

As a result, different models of intelligence continue to flourish, but the accumulating research on mental processing increasingly constrains the plausible alternatives. The most striking constraints are these: Performance on even the simplest information-processing tasks, such as speed in responding to lights or briefly presented tones, is substantially correlated with IQ (from about .3 to .7 on a scale from 0 to 1, depending on the sets of measures involved). Although not a settled question, it appears that more than one such process is probably necessary for accounting for IQ differences, which, if true, means that *g* is not unitary (that is, it does not consist simply of speed of processing). Information processing measured in newborns and young infants (in particular, "infant habituation" to novel stimuli, which is a form of speed of apprehension measured by shifts in eye gaze) predicts their IQs later in childhood remarkably well (.7, corrected for unreliability)—meaning that some IQ-related differences emerge before socialization. Performance on more complex information-processing tasks that are designed to predict performance in different content areas (say, verbal versus spatial or numerical tasks) actually predicts about equally well across all content areas and provides additional evidence for a content-independent, general-intelligence factor that influences performance on virtually all intellectual tasks.

Other studies show biological involvement that any theory of intelligence must explain (see Arthur Jensen's 1993 summary in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*). Behavior genetic studies of

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some forms of speed of information processing, for example, find that they are moderately heritable and that they share common genetic influence with *g*. Positron-emission tomography (PET) studies of the brain have found that higher IQ individuals metabolize less glucose (use less "energy") during problem solving; electroencephalogram (EEG) studies show that brain waves in response to such simple stimuli as tones are more complex in brighter individuals; and studies of nerve conduction velocity in the central nervous system demonstrate faster conduction in brighter people. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) studies of in vitro brain size are consistent with many studies of head circumference in producing correlations of about .3 to .4 between brain size and intelligence (controlling for body size).

Much of the experimental research was meant to dislodge *g*, but, as Brody points out, it has actually strengthened the need for such a content-independent general capacity in explaining intelligence. There is little agreement yet on the elements of *g*, but the many correlates of *g* in cognitive-processing research suggest such possibilities as speed of processing elementary information, capacity of working memory, ability to sustain attention, and ability to discriminate similar stimuli under difficult conditions (such as distraction and limited exposure). A look at the social correlates of *g*—discussed presently—provides more information about its meaning. Whatever it is, *g* is implicated in brain processes and social processes alike.

What creates differences in intelligence? The nature-nurture question has embroiled the study of intelligence in public controversy more than any other. The standard formulation of that controversy depicts individuals as passive creatures, of either their genes or their environments. This public caricature of the question of causation bears no resemblance to its scientific study and the answers gleaned thus far. Contemporary research paints quite a different picture: human beings as active agents, with the capacity both to modify and to sustain themselves and their environments—a bounded capacity to be sure, but substantial nonetheless.

The new field of behavioral genetics has revolutionized inquiry into the so-called nature-nurture question in the last two decades. Somewhat a misnomer, behavior genetics is the simultaneous study of the environmental and genetic origins of human traits. It provides a set of techniques for estimating how much of the variation among individuals in a population can be attributed to environmental variation, genetic variation, and the inseparable combination of the two. Research is far beyond arguing whether nature or nurture is more important—a question it regards as misleadingly simplistic. As de-

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scribed in recent scientific books (such as Robert Plomin and Gerald McClearn's *Nature, Nurture, and Psychology*) and journals (*Science*, June 17, 1994), behavior genetics is turning upside down many of our notions about both environment and heredity.

There is no doubt whatsoever that IQ differences among individuals can be traced to both genetic and environmental differences. Contrary to common perception, however, estimates of overall heritability (the squared correlation of phenotype with genotype) are not of primary interest but are only preludes to deeper analysis. Heritability estimates depend on the degrees of genetic and environmental variation in the population studied, but such variation can vary over time and place without reflecting any change in the nature of intelligence itself.

Imagine a society in which genetic variation for intelligence is moderate but unchanging over generations. Imagine also that the society evolves from one in which living conditions differ dramatically from one individual to another into a society in which all persons live in fairly equal circumstances. This is the goal of modern democracies, which seek equal opportunity through equal conditions of birth. As intimated earlier, heritabilities for intelligence will *rise* dramatically in that society as social circumstances are equalized. Its citizens may become less variable in observed intelligence, but the remaining IQ differences among them will be mostly genetic in origin. Intelligence influences socio-economic outcomes, so heritabilities will rise for the latter as well.

Genetic differences will loom large in this highly egalitarian society. Its remaining social distinctions could be eliminated only by eliminating the genetic differences or by somehow short-circuiting their influence. So far, no society has been able to do either. Such pre-school interventions as the Milwaukee Project and Head Start have failed to raise low IQs permanently. Similarly, no one has yet discovered how to equalize rates of learning from instruction or experience among individuals at different levels of the IQ continuum, despite occasional claims to the contrary.

Although of limited interest in themselves, estimates of overall heritability have been important in exposing a serious error in much social science research, which is to interpret all family effects as environmental. To illustrate, parents from higher social classes are brighter on average than parents from lower social classes, and their children are likely advantaged both genetically and environmentally. Differences between higher and lower social class children, whether in intelligence, personality, or psychopathology, therefore, cannot be attributed solely to differences in their environments. Unfortunately,

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much social science research infers precisely that they can—thus substantially overestimating the environmental effects of parents and families. Behavior geneticists such as David Rowe (*The Limits of Family Influence*) argue that most research on child development is uninterpretable because it has ignored the genetic component in the family transmission of behavioral traits.

Heritabilities tell us little about the extent to which IQ might be changed through environmental means, but *shifts* in heritability can reveal a lot about the nature of environmental effects that currently influence development. Scholars and laypeople alike have long assumed that environmental effects on intelligence and personality escalate from infancy through adolescence. For example, many social interventions such as Head Start assume that early intervention is essential because environmental effects on children are enduring and cumulative.

Behavior genetics reveals the opposite. The heritability of intelligence *rises* with age, from about .4 in early childhood to about .8 in old age (on a scale from 0 to 1). About 40 percent of the variation in intelligence among younger children and 80 percent among older adults is owing to genetic differences among them (leaving 60 percent and 20 percent, respectively, to differences in their environments). Longitudinal adoption studies provide graphic evidence of this shifting balance between environmental and genetic effects during development. With increasing age, adopted children become *less* like their adoptive parents and siblings and *more* like their natural parents in intelligence.

Using sophisticated statistical modeling techniques, behavior geneticists estimate two different components of environmental influence. (Such modeling can also produce estimates of additive and non-additive genetic effects as well as of genotype-environment interactions.) The two environmental components are shared (between-family) effects and non-shared (within-family) effects. Shared effects reflect family influences that affect all siblings in the same way—parental education, say, or child-rearing styles. Non-shared effects refer to environments and experiences that siblings do not share—health history, prenatal environments, parental favoritism, different teachers and friends.

Estimates of these two environmental components are obtained by modeling the correlations among people who are characterized by different degrees of genetic and environmental similarity (for example, identical versus fraternal twins reared together or apart, adoptive versus natural parents and siblings, and so on). Many good data sets are now available for such purposes, including national registries

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of twins in some countries and longitudinal inquiries such as the Colorado and Texas Adoption Studies. Together, these projects sample most of the environmental variation found in Western societies. They do not include families in extreme poverty or great wealth.

Resulting estimates of the two components of environmental influence consistently show that non-shared environments are more important than shared ones in accounting for IQ differences, no matter what age group was considered—that is, the environments that most influence IQ are the ones that relatives do not share rather than the ones they do. (*The Limits of Family Influence* describes the same results for other ability and personality traits studied so far, excluding criminality.) The effect on IQ of shared family environments drops to nil by adulthood, as illustrated by the vanishingly small correlation between the adult IQs of unrelated individuals who grew up together.

It is hard to exaggerate the implications of this well-replicated finding on shared versus non-shared effects. It obviously does not mean that environments are unimportant. We know, for instance, that duration of schooling, exposure to lead, malnutrition, and perinatal conditions together may explain several percent of the IQ variation in the U.S. And, as noted, research to date has not included extreme environments with conceivably atypical effects.

Instead, the data on shared versus non-shared influences suggest that we have greatly misunderstood the nature of environmental effects. Most environmental effects do not, as so often assumed, stem from differences among family units and their members' shared experiences. By far most families in Western society seem equal in their capacity to stimulate the development of adult intelligence. Rather, environmental effects stem mostly from differences *within* families—that is, from influences we experience as individuals, not as members of the same family.

Consider, for example, that parents do not treat their children identically, as much as some may try, and there is much randomness in children's lives with regard to friendships, teachers, and other experiences. Children with different personalities (shy versus gregarious, calm versus impulsive) and capabilities (bright versus dull, athletic versus not) tend to evoke different reactions from both family members and others. Siblings also tend to evoke different reactions, even in shared environments, because they often differ considerably from one another for genetic reasons (on average, they share only half their genes in common). Most people do not realize how widely siblings and their parents differ among themselves (by about 12 IQ points, on the average, compared to an average difference of 17

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points between any two random individuals in the U.S. population).

Sandra Scarr has also described (in *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*) how people make their own environments. Different genotypes (say, extroverts versus introverts) seek out different experiences and create different environments for themselves, especially as they become more independent from their families. She refers to this as niche finding. In short, environmental effects are a different and probably richer stew than we have imagined—and one, moreover, to which individuals may make their own contributions.

Behavior genetics also stimulates rethinking about the course of intellectual and personality development throughout the life span. Specifically, it shows how both change and continuity from one age to another may often have partly genetic roots. Nathan Brody's *Intelligence* reviews recent research on mental capabilities in childhood and their decline in later life. In summary, behavior genetics research puts the discovery of high heritabilities for intelligence in new perspective. Contrary to the canards, this finding does not mean that intelligence is fixed at birth, unchanging, or unchangeable. Genetic differences may indeed contribute to an inevitable mental hierarchy among individuals based on mental ability, but the limited genetic similarity of siblings and parents guarantees that members of the same family will tend to fall along very different points of the IQ continuum. Environmental effects may move family members up or down over time on the IQ continuum, but they apparently tend not to move members in tandem. These independent effects on family members are not entirely random, however. Instead, they probably result partly from members searching out niches more congenial to their different genotypes. People help to create their own environments.

How important are differences in intelligence? In order to determine how important they are, one must ask "for what" (education, employment, family life), "for whom" (individuals, groups, societies), and "relative to what else" (personality, social class, physical abilities).

Pertinent evidence comes from thousands of studies across many decades and disciplines. Most of the evidence derives from applied research in education, training, and employment selection, some of it experimental, and much of that from nonacademic settings (military, private sector, federal government). Other evidence derives from academic research attempting to explain social problems (crime and delinquency, family pathologies) or processes (income inequality, child development). Relatively little of this research has yet been mined to answer questions about the importance of *g* in social life, but clear patterns are already evident.

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The research discloses two fundamental facts about the relation of *g* to the success and well-being of individuals. First, low intelligence seldom guarantees failure, and high intelligence never guarantees success. Rather, *g* affects the *odds* of particular outcomes. The higher the level of *g*, the more favorable the odds. Contrary to popular belief, there seems to be no threshold above which additional intelligence ceases to be useful.

The second fact is that the differences in odds associated with different IQ levels seem to widen or narrow depending on the nature of the tasks and outcomes considered. Put another way, a higher IQ is a much bigger advantage in some arenas of life than others. Such outcome-specific variations in the importance of *g* are often usefully quantified by calculating correlations with IQ. The higher an outcome correlates with *g*, the more "*g*-loaded" it is said to be (the more it calls upon *g*). Average *g* loadings are about .2 (on a scale from 0 to 1) for law-abidingness, .4 for job performance, .6 for years of education attained, and .8 for standardized academic achievement. While moderately *g*-loaded on the average, jobs differ in *g* loading depending on the nature and variety of their tasks, rising from about .2 for simple jobs to .8 for highly complex occupations. Learning some jobs is more *g* loaded than performing them once they are learned.

Detailed job analyses show that the major distinction among jobs is their dependence on *g*, and the major distinction between more and less *g*-loaded jobs is the cognitive complexity of their constituent tasks, as indicated by requirements for reasoning and making judgments, identifying and reacting to problem situations quickly, and continually learning job-related information. What these *g* loadings simultaneously imply is that "other things" matter much more than *g* for some outcomes (committing a crime, performing well in unskilled work), but much less than *g* for others (succeeding academically or in professional work).

Personnel-selection psychologists have tried in recent years to reduce the importance of *g* in hiring. Their efforts have been only minimally fruitful but have generated much data on the importance of *g* relative to other factors. Meta-analyses confirm that batteries of special aptitude tests rarely predict job performance much better than *g* alone, the latter carrying "the freight of prediction" in all but the simplest jobs (where physical capabilities are more important). Intensive experimentation with less *g*-loaded predictors, both old (personality tests) and new (biographic inventories), demonstrates that they are often useful predictors of overall performance yet seldom equal the utility of mental tests. With the exception of the personality trait of "conscientiousness," the less *g*-loaded predictors

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(such as the specific aptitudes) are useful across a narrower range of jobs (say, sales but not clerical or crafts work) than is *g*. Recent efforts to map separate dimensions of job performance (among soldiers) show that *g* predicts technical proficiency (both general and specific) much better than do temperament and personality traits, though the latter tend to be the better predictors of some aspects of performance (self-discipline, professional bearing). Better training and lengthier experience can enhance job performance, but they do not equalize the performance of brighter and less bright workers.

Life can be conceptualized as a series of tasks and circumstances ranging in *g* loadedness from high to low, and adults may be able to carve out niches that limit demands for *g* and emphasize other talents. Yet virtually everything we value in social life (from health to social adjustment) seems to correlate at least a little with IQ, probably because most tasks in life involve at least a little judgment or learning.

The general implication for individuals is clear. Life is replete with more or less *g*-loaded tasks, from learning a trade and handling personal finances to reading a bus schedule and dealing with troublesome neighbors. Low-IQ individuals therefore have the odds stacked against them to some degree virtually everywhere they turn. They seem to face their greatest hurdles in getting ahead in school and occupations.

Other research has emphasized the implications of *g* for groups. It has involved two general questions: first, how does upward or downward displacement (location) of a bell curve along the IQ continuum change the proportions of high- versus low-IQ individuals in a group, and, second, does race and ethnicity change the odds of success associated with particular levels of IQ? These two factors—the proportions of individuals at each IQ level and the odds associated with those IQ levels—together determine the rates of good and bad outcomes exhibited by the groups in question.

The evidence shows that bell curves are located higher on the IQ continuum for some groups (Ashkenazi Jews and probably East Asians) but lower for others (blacks, Hispanics) when compared to the majority population. Higher proportions of individuals in the former groups fall in the ranges of IQ with highly favorable odds, while relatively more members of the latter groups fall in the high-risk ranges of IQ. All else being equal, upwardly displaced groups will have relatively high rates of the favorable outcomes associated with high *g* (graduate education, professional employment) and low rates of the negative outcomes associated with low *g* (school failure, chronic dependence on welfare). The reverse will be true for downwardly displaced groups.

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The research comparing IQ bell curves also shows clearly how the displacement of curves has its biggest effects on the "tails" of a curve, meaning that a small shift of the curve up or down the IQ continuum can have dramatic effects on rates of behavior associated with very high or very low IQs. For instance, the 15-point downward displacement of the bell curve for American blacks cuts by three the proportion of blacks above the white average (about IQ 100), but it cuts by twenty the proportion available in the IQ range typical of physicians and engineers (above IQ 115) and multiplies by seven the proportion falling in the retarded range (below IQ 70). Clearly, a considerably larger proportion of blacks than whites battle against daunting odds. So too, no doubt, do their families and communities as a result.

All else besides IQ is not always equal, of course, so some research looks specifically at how odds along the IQ continuum may differ depending on race or ethnicity. Outcomes with perhaps the closest causal connections to *g* seem to show the most similar odds. For example, the evidence concerning on-the-job and standardized academic performance indicates that blacks, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic whites with the same IQs perform about equally well. However, the rates are better than expected for some groups on some outcomes and worse than expected on others, compared to whites.

The Bell Curve illustrates such deviations, some of them already well known, in its sample of young adults. Controlling for IQ and age, blacks and Hispanics were *more* likely than whites to hold a bachelor's degree and a high-IQ job. On the other hand, blacks (but not Hispanics) were less likely to be married or employed and more likely to be on welfare if poor. Controlling for IQ and age, Hispanics were somewhat more likely and blacks much more likely to have children out of wedlock, live in poverty as an adult, or be incarcerated. Thus, group disproportions in IQ seem to provide a partial—but only partial—explanation for various racial-ethnic inequalities in outcome.

Only rarely have scholars asked how societies evolve in response to their members' differences in *g*. The question is of considerable contemporary importance, however, as modern economies raise the premium on *g*. How a society attempts to change or evade the causal significance of individual and group differences in *g* can itself alter systems of education, law, politics, and economy. Such attempts at avoidance may have as far-reaching consequences on social institutions and national life as the differences in *g* they would negate. Our own nation's largely unacknowledged struggle with the democratic paradox seems a case in point.

To summarize: *g* is a general mental capability and has correspondingly general importance in social life. It is the ability to deal

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with complexity in mental tests and seems to confer its greatest advantages in performing the more complex tasks in life. Other personal traits always matter, especially when complexity is only moderate to low, but higher intelligence continues to confer some advantage in the simplest mental tasks. Even a moderately low IQ does not prevent one from being a good citizen, mate, and parent, but it does make many ordinary life tasks much more difficult.

Group disparities in IQ draw particular attention in a democracy by virtue of the unsettling inequalities to which they lead. The consequences of group disparities are, however, but a special case of the democratic paradox. Moreover, they divert attention from the deeper crosscurrents created by the wide dispersion in human intelligence—dispersion that characterizes all societies but especially bedevils modern democracies.

Research on intelligence thus points up an endemic problem of modern, technological democracy. The combination of increasingly similar social conditions and increasingly technological jobs makes differences in intelligence both more important and more prominent in American life. Not surprisingly, however, critics blame the study of intelligence rather than democracy or technology. Americans seem to have an enduring faith that the solution to democratic or technological problems is simply more democracy or more technology. But while the critics, in my view, wrongly blame the messenger, they are correct in one critical respect. In an earlier age, success in life rested on a wider variety of personal characteristics, including enterprise, tenacity, and sheer physical prowess. Today, the basis of socio-economic success seems narrower and limited to a smaller segment of the population. What makes *g* so important in America today is modern, technological democracy itself.

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What Do Movie Producers Do?

BARBARA MALTBY

MY EARLY ATTRACTION TO THE MOVIES began in the usual way—faithful attendance at Saturday afternoon matinees. But the venue was most unusual—a small-town, suburban theater whose manager, Mr. Emma, wearing white gloves, greeted every patron, young and old, by name and shook each person's hand. Mr. Emma's style and manner were my first and last experience in anything akin to graciousness in the movie business, a business characterized by wildly egocentric, if not downright sociopathic, behavior.

Actually, the movie business suffers from an institutional form of bipolar mood disorder. On any given day it can raise you to the heavens or cast you into the depths at least two or three times. The money is there; no it's not. The star has committed; no she hasn't. The meeting is tomorrow; no, it's been canceled . . . indefinitely. As an example, I got a phone call a few months ago telling me that a project I had started in 1984 was finally about to begin production. The script, after numerous revisions, was in good enough shape for Robert Redford to commit to play the lead role, that of a fictional president. In 1993, however, the project was sold to Rob Reiner's company, Castle Rock, and they bought out my contract with Redford and Universal. I received my fee and associate producer credit, but I have had no further involvement in the movie beyond feeling grateful that it was finally being made.

The immensely long and tortuous journey that the script had taken to reach this point is a saga that reflects what I have come to know and think about the movie business. So given the nature of that business, I wasn't surprised when, a few weeks after the first call, I got another call. Redford had changed his mind and had dropped out of the project, but maybe, just maybe, they would be able to get Michael Douglas to play the part and salvage everything. Inured to the ups and downs of this project over the last decade, I barely registered either piece of news. Life in Hollywood is a delicate balance between

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protecting one's sanity and avoiding a slip into full-blown cynicism. This was a project, after all, that had been six weeks from production once before. In fact, the story behind it may be just as good as the movie.

The project, which began life as a script called *The President Elopes*, is now known by the unimaginative title of *The American President*. Its lurching journey toward the Bethlehem of an actual starting date has intrigue, surprise, despair, and possibly redemption. But most of all, recounting the story of *The President Elopes* answers the question I am most frequently asked: "What exactly do producers do?"

Before taking up *The President Elopes*, I need to explain certain fundamental facts about the movie business in order to show how difficult it is to get a movie made. First of all, very few movies of any kind are made relative to the number of stories and scripts that are written and submitted and even paid for. Most submissions never get optioned. (An option is a contract that gives the exclusive, though time-limited, right to develop the material for film.) Of those stories that are optioned, I suspect that less than one out of every three hundred ever makes it into production and into the theaters. In my early years working with Robert Redford, when it was my job to screen all the projects submitted to him, I was reading up to five hundred scripts and books a year, and I never recommended more than twenty-five to him. Good screenwriting is immensely difficult to find, precisely because it is so very difficult to do.

The most important fact about the movies to keep in mind is also the most obvious—money is at the heart of all moviemaking. In this business, movies are usually referred to as "product," as in "Columbia doesn't have enough product in the pipeline." This so-called product exists for one purpose alone—to make a profit, preferably an enormous profit. Only independently financed, non-Hollywood movies intended for smaller audiences have the luxury of freely exercising artistic intentions. In the minds of most Hollywood executives, art, at best, equates with a European breakthrough hit such as *Enchanted April*. At worst, art means a movie with a dismal two-week run at a fine-arts theater; then, with luck, its video rights are sold so that some of the costs can be regained.

In Hollywood, a "bad" movie means one that is non-commercial, that has no appeal for a mass audience. Such a movie might be too intellectual or too soft (which is another way of saying it's just a woman's film), or it might be too offbeat or even too serious.

The kind of "good" story that Hollywood is looking for is the blockbuster hit that appeals to a huge audience—*Jurassic Park* or *Lethal Weapon*, for example. This all-or-nothing approach has a poten-

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tial for disaster. An expensive movie that fails to find an audience can nearly wreck a studio. Some movies cost as much as seventy to eighty million dollars to produce. In fact, *Waterworld* cost an astonishing one hundred and fifty million dollars. That seems like an absurd amount to spend on a movie. But consider this—the *average* cost to make a movie in 1995 is fifty million dollars, more than double what it was five years ago.

Then, too, a studio doesn't start to see profit just because a movie earns back its production costs. A general rule of thumb for considering profitability used to be that a movie had to earn two and a half times its initial cost before it broke even. Now that movies can cost anywhere from five to one hundred and fifty million dollars, there is no such simple yardstick. What hasn't changed is the number and kind of added costs that can extend the point of profitability from several times the cost of production to a point someplace north of infinity—"the rolling break" it's actually called. For example, additional expenses come from advertising, making film prints, overhead charges of 15 to 25 percent that the studio imposes for use of its facilities and personnel, and, not least, interest payments on the money the studio borrowed from the bank in order to make the movie in the first place. What this means is that there is no clear definition for predicting when a film will break even, particularly for a very expensive movie, and most particularly when the stars of that movie have a gross participation in the profits and start taking a percentage of box-office returns from the very first dollar. This situation explains why a movie like *Forrest Gump* can theoretically still be in the red after grossing more than three hundred million dollars. With expenses so high and profits so tenuous, one can understand why Hollywood is so averse to taking risks and why it usually goes for the lowest common denominator and thus the largest audience appeal.

The need to pay back all those costs above the initial investment also explains why good small movies are often yanked from theaters after the first week. A studio doesn't want to spend any money on advertising unless it is guaranteed that the advertising will build enough of an audience to make it worthwhile. It would rather write off the loss. This is exactly what happened to *King of the Hill*—a movie I produced in 1993—despite its surprisingly good reviews.

In the movie business, money is power. Money defines the culture of Hollywood, a culture that is narcissistic, amoral, insular, and insulated—and I believe I'm being charitable in this description. Robert Altman's movie *The Player* is an accurate view of this world. Paul Attanasio, the writer of *Quiz Show*, who happens to live in New York, remarked that "people in Hollywood seem so ingenuously nice but it

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masks a deep cynicism and a killer instinct. New Yorkers, on the other hand, have a surface cynicism that hides a surprising naïveté." I think it's an apt description of the Hollywood mentality—even some women have had to adopt it, though, until recently, women haven't been a real part of the system.

Hollywood has traditionally been run by men—now mostly young men. The reason for this is simple: action-adventure movies that aspire to be blockbusters must appeal to the young men who will see the movie four or five times; so who better to understand the viewers' taste than other young men?

Fortunately, there are other criteria for assessing what might make a good movie. Of course, this is always subjective, but since I was working for just one person, I had to satisfy only two people's standards—mine and, of course, Robert Redford's. *Ordinary People*, a novel that we were sent before it was published and became popular, is a good example. I realized, with surprise, that it was set in Lake Forest, Illinois, the town where I grew up. But my response to it was based on something more than a personal shock of recognition. It contained three compelling main characters and a powerful and evocative story line with which most people could identify. However, it was the interplay between the controlled outer behavior of the characters and the anguish and turmoil just beneath that polite surface that was most significant. It is the tension between those two planes that is the stuff of real drama. It didn't take a genius to see any of this. But it did take some ability to see beyond the book's potential soap-opera quality and episodic structure to the movie it could become. I quickly sent it on to Redford with a five-star recommendation.

As a result of *Ordinary People*'s success, I began to work on the development of Redford's in-house projects—that is, projects we developed within Wildwood, his film division, for Redford to star in or direct. Developing movies, which takes up as much as 90 percent of a producer's time, comes in stages. First, you need to find a good piece of material. It could be a book, a treatment, or an already existing screenplay. The second stage usually involves finding the option money necessary to get things under way. Fortunately, I didn't have to expend much energy on this stage, because Redford's interest in a project tended to guarantee the financing and Michael Ovitz, renowned Hollywood power broker, was there to make things work.

The next stage is the heart of what is known in the trade as "development hell." It begins with trying to find the right screenwriter for the project—an ordeal that can take months. The writer you want might not be available or might want too much money.

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Perhaps a writer can't be found because no one seems to have the right skills for that particular project.

Once you do have the writer, work begins on the script itself. This is the time when, to borrow from Mr. Eliot, the shadow truly falls between the conception and the reality. Creativity cannot be programmed; good work cannot be extracted by contractual obligation; and writers are, by definition, vulnerable. Screenwriters are particularly vulnerable because, unlike playwrights, they do not control the project they are writing. They are hired, which means that they can be fired at any time. The only advantage they enjoy is that they are paid whether or not their work is acceptable. Thus screenwriting can be financially rewarding while still subjecting the writer to a considerable amount of pain and rejection.

Under the best of circumstances, it takes about three years to develop, produce, and release a movie. That leaves a lot of room for things to go wrong. People in Hollywood are always waiting—for a writer to finish, for a phone call to be returned, for a meeting to be scheduled, for an actor or director to decide if he or she wants to be involved.

I have been on both ends of that particular problem. For four years after *Ordinary People* was released, Robert Redford didn't make another movie; he had kept a lot of people waiting for a commitment that he couldn't seem to make. One of the problems with being a star is that you have too many choices, and this can lead to paralysis in decision making. Redford's impasse was finally broken when he agreed to star in *The Natural* for Barry Levinson's company. At the same time, I got a job offer from ABC Motion Pictures to be an independent producer, essentially doing what I was doing already—but doing it not for an individual but for a company. After spending ten years with Redford and after a four-year dry spell, I decided that it was time for me to move on.

Going to work for ABC Motion Pictures seemed to solve a number of problems while also creating new ones. First, it meant functioning without Redford's protection and clout. In the movie business it is very useful to be aligned with a powerful person. I had been in an ivory tower at Redford's company, working with a man of intelligence and taste who had the rare power to make any movie he wanted. I had been sent every good (and not so good) script and book without having to scrounge, woo, or con anyone—necessary activities for almost all producers. Michael Ovitz used to call me at least three times a day. He was desperate to get Bob to work. At ABC, Ovitz would *return* my phone calls, but without my Redford connection, he certainly had no need to call me.

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Most difficult to deal with, however, was the loss of a kind of seamless communication and shorthand that I had had with Bob Redford, whose taste I shared and who loved to talk about interesting movie ideas. The head of production for ABC was a different animal altogether. He was in Los Angeles, which meant I had to communicate with him by phone. And although he was smart, he had a very short attention span, which is not uncommon in Hollywood. He wanted every potential project to be reduced to a single sentence. "*Terminator Two* meets *Pretty Woman*," he might say. This is what is known as a "high-concept" idea—easily understood, easily sold.

I wasn't good at high-concept delivery or ideas, and he wasn't interested in listening to complexity or nuance. "Stu, Stu," I'd say, "hear me out. This is a great idea!"

"Don't have time, Babe, gotta go, people in my office . . ."

Sometimes I'd just get the single word, "Boorriinng."

Then one day Stu came to New York, and, as they say, we did lunch. I had just read *The President Elopes* and fallen in love with it. It was more a thirties romantic comedy than something high-concept, but I had nothing to lose. Anyway, I figured that Stu couldn't hang up on me while we were sitting at the same table.

"So," I began, "I think I found this terrific story. It has two great roles for stars." (It's important to lead with that.)

"Like who?" he interrupted.

"Well, Redford. Meryl Streep. It's about a fictional president, a bachelor, who left behind the girl he loved when he became obsessed with politics. She has never forgiven him and, it turns out, has bought his family's old farm, which, coincidentally, is on the site of a proposed federal project that is politically crucial to him. The catch is, she won't move. He decides he'll go talk to her. She's a young Katharine Hepburn type and consequently isn't impressed by his power or charm. She turns him down. He, of course, falls madly in love with her again. . . ."

At that point, Stu interrupted me. "I love it. I see the whole thing—let's get it." He quickly pays the bill and we go back to the office, where he calls L.A. and tells the ABC lawyer to start negotiating with the writer. I began to see a few advantages to this new job. Stu may not have been able to listen, but he had no trouble making decisions.

Within a few days, I had flown to L.A. for meetings with Stu and the writer, whose name is Bill Richert—an auspicious beginning for *The President Elopes*, or so I thought at the time.

In that initial meeting the story began to change. The president was now a widower with a small child (more sympathetic, you see),

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who was very unhappy as well as lonely in the White House. The re-election campaign was about to begin, but the president seems strangely removed from it all. And then he falls in love, but with the wrong woman—a woman who is politically dangerous because she won't play the Washington game. She has seen what too much power does to the male ego. She resists his advances, though she must leave Washington to do so. He has to find a way to go after her, in disguise of course. By spending time incognito as an ordinary man, he finds again the core values that made him want to be president in the first place, and he wins her heart.

Bill, the screenwriter, and I had six weeks to produce the new draft. It seemed like plenty of time, but then I wasn't familiar with Bill's work habits. I gave Bill three days to start, and then we were to go over his new pages together. Three days later, he told me he needed another three days. Three weeks later he had done about ten of the requisite one hundred twenty pages that make a full screenplay.

At that point my life became devoted to getting Bill to work. I'd call and wake him up at 10:00 A.M. I'd call at 11:00 to announce I was arriving with coffee and donuts, which was when he actually got out of bed. About 2:00 in the afternoon, he'd finally be at the typewriter, while I sat in the other room waiting for him to produce the pages we would go over together. Usually they were strange and quite wonderful, but they were rarely on the point of the story since Bill refused to outline or plot scenes ahead. Planning would destroy his creative juices, he claimed. Thus, my job was to provide the narrative coherence to his gifted imagination. He was a screamer, in a sort of caffeine-fed, non-violent, ex-alcoholic, black Irish sort of way—just excitable, he would say—so we worked at high pitch for four weeks, every day and every night until we had a script.

Then we did a second draft based on Stu's reactions. We knew that there would be a third draft once we started sending it to directors, and then a fourth and fifth and so on, because, after all, that's what always happens. Usually, too, the original writer is replaced by someone deemed better at structure or dialogue or romance or whatever it is that, right or wrong, the story seems to lack.

But this was not to be Bill's fate—at least not yet. Instead, there was an unexpected move out of left field that threatened the project. Cap Cities bought ABC in 1985 and decided to shut down its motion picture division. Because I had brought *The President Elopes* to ABC, the project came back to me in turnaround when ABC was disbanded.

Now that I wasn't affiliated with any company for the first time in my career, I began to understand the unsettling implications of being an independent producer. My first step was to find a new home for

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The President Elopes with a studio or company that would be willing both to pick up the costs already charged against it, which now amounted to half a million dollars, and to put up new money. I might mention another disadvantage to being an independent producer: we get very little money unless a project actually goes into production. So only a tiny amount of that half million came to me—about eight thousand dollars, actually—for my time and effort during the development period.

I sent the script to about fifty different studios, production companies, and stars, including the person at Redford's company who had taken my place. Although it seemed ironic at the time, I shouldn't have been surprised that Redford ended up optioning the script. There are only a few stars who can play a president, after all.

So three years after I left, I was back at Wildwood as the executive producer of *The President Elopes.* Executive producer, by the way, is a title that is usually given to the person responsible for the project existing in the first place, either because he or she owns it or has gotten the financing. The producer, on the other hand, has the daily responsibility for managing the physical as well as the creative parts of producing the movie.

There is an even more arcane hierarchy having to do with such credits as co-executive producer, co-producer, and associate producer—all of which, in descending order, refer to a variety of responsibilities. Whatever the title, the duties and functions are rarely the same from movie to movie.

Back at Wildwood, the development nightmare began all over again. I tried to shepherd Bill again, but unsuccessfully. The day of his deadline, having assured me that everything was completely under control, he turned in a draft with a tacked-on ending that was only two-thirds finished.

The writer who replaced Bill—for that was of course what had to happen—was his polar opposite. He worked from 3:00 A.M. until 4:30 P.M. At first this seemed like a blessing, but such compulsiveness doesn't necessarily breed a light and romantic heart. He turned a witty and charming tale of seduction and resistance into a story about two people who spend their time together talking about their feelings. Very New Age but hardly a recipe for emotional tension or humor.

Now the secret in all great love stories is that some kind of barrier must exist between the two lovers. If two people meet, fall in love, and then nothing gets in their way, there's nowhere for the story to go. The problem with the late twentieth century is that traditional barriers such as feuding families, class, color, sexual taboos, or marriage rarely apply.

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The tension and surprise of *The President Elopes*, therefore, lay in the ironic twist of watching a woman say no to a man with the charm of Redford and the power of a president. Her very resistance is why the story works. Even though the next writer was chosen exactly because he seemed to have a feeling for this kind of Tracy-Hepburn relationship, for some unfathomable reason, he was only interested in the president's relationship with his dead wife, a character who had intentionally never been in any version of the story. Three months later, this stubborn writer was also off the project.

We had now spent four years and more than two million dollars on this movie, and we were back at square one. You must surely be wondering why we continued to bother. The answer is easy. Bill's initial version had enormous charm and great emotional gratification, which were derived from its themes of personal *and* national transformation and redemption. It also had something more unusual—real flair.

And so we continued. The "we" at this point, some five years after I had first started working on the story, consisted of the people who had replaced the people who had replaced me at running Redford's company. At this point, I was also a salaried producer on other Wildwood projects (which was very lucky considering that eight thousand dollars).

To condense things: since 1989 and before its sale to Castle Rock, another two to three million dollars has been spent on the development of *The President Elopes*, bringing the total to more than four million dollars. Five additional writers have worked on the script, none successfully. It seemed that every story solution only created a new story problem. Several directors preceded Reiner. With one of these directors, we came within six weeks of production. The crew was hired and sets were being built—but we still didn't have a good script. The latest version, written by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, the writers of films such as *City Slickers*, was funny in a macho, political sort of way, but much of its romance and charm was sacrificed. Since these problems could not be resolved before the projected start of *A River Runs Through It*, production had to be halted.

A similar halt threatened after Redford pulled out of the movie last year. His decision did not surprise me, however. He had always been drawn to the story for its intense romantic appeal as much as for its skewering of power and politics. Reiner, on the other hand, wanted to make a more realistic version of the story, perhaps because of the success of *Dave*, a film that bore a close resemblance to *The President Elopes* in tone and feeling. But when Michael Douglas quickly agreed to take Redford's place and Annette Bening signed on, production was finally assured.

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The movie opened in November 1995. It has garnered much publicity and many good reviews. But a small sidebar drama is actually taking place, a sub-plot introduced at the last minute. Aaron Sorkin, the current writer, has gotten the Writers Guild to award him sole screenplay credit, not because he so substantially reworked earlier versions of *The President Elopes,* but because he claims that *The American President* is an *original* script of his that Reiner hired him to do a year before *The President Elopes* was acquired. At the Writers Guild hearing, Sorkin's lawyer also claimed that Sorkin had "no access to prior writers' materials until the time of arbitration"—that is, until just two months ago.

This contention certainly challenges my credulity. Without directly impugning Sorkin's account, I can only say that I never heard about this "original" screenplay of Sorkin's until now. My own notes from 1993, when Reiner was negotiating with Redford and Universal, mention that Reiner would, "with Aaron Sorkin as writer, do a completely new script, less comical, more real than the Ganz/Mandel version, which is what he, Reiner, saw." In several 1994 interviews in *Variety,* Reiner denies having read the screenplay, but he does confirm talking with Redford and the people at Wildwood. This fact alone is enough to establish a chain of story transmission under the rules of the Writers Guild. Sorkin himself, after the Writers Guild ruled in his favor, has now admitted that he heard about *The President Elopes* directly from Redford and actually read "several" pages of the Ganz/Mandel version. The important thing to note is that a "new version" is not an "original" one. And for one familiar with the many different versions of *The President Elopes,* the draft of Sorkin's screenplay that I read is still clearly derived from Bill's, despite its many changes. Sadly, the result of the Writers Guild's acceptance of Sorkin's initial claim is that Bill Richert, whose original idea it was, will receive no credit or remuneration at all. This sudden announcement of Sorkin's also provides an interesting post-modern flavor to this article. Maybe *The President Elopes* was never made after all, and *The American President* is some sort of surprise stepchild come to claim all the inheritance.

Now the story behind the production of *The President Elopes* isn't exactly the norm in moviemaking, but it's not all that abnormal either. In fact, I have another project, which was started in 1980, that still has a very faint possibility of being made by Robert De Niro. What is typical of *The President Elopes,* however, is the almost daily roller-coaster ride of good news followed by bad news followed by a ray of hope followed by a sinking feeling followed by relief followed by unreturned phone calls.

The difficulties and frustration I went through with *The President*

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Elopes, and with the movie business in general, do not negate the great satisfaction and real luck that have also been mine. I have worked with people of great vision and skill. And I have seen patience rewarded. More important, I haven't lost the sense of magical power—the power to electrify an audience—that a good movie has. I believe that *Ordinary People, A River Runs Through It,* and *King of the Hill,* the three movies I have had a hand in making, are examples of movies that both entertain and illuminate. All three share certain characteristics, though with no conscious intent. That all were originally books is not surprising. Books comprise a major source for movie projects, because you don't have to start from scratch to develop a story and characters. All three movies are about families and the difficulty that family members have in understanding and communicating their feelings to one another. All three feature two brothers, one of whom is killed or in serious danger and whose trials necessarily provoke change in the family, even when change is strongly opposed. In each case, much of the emphasis in the story is on the father-son relationship—a particular concern of Robert Redford's. Witness that same relationship in *Quiz Show,* for instance.

As I've said, these similarities were not intentional. Each had quite a different genesis. *Ordinary People* was sent to me in manuscript. *A River Runs Through It* was an underground classic that had been much sought after by many people in the movie business. Norman Maclean refused all offers and then decided that he would, with help, attempt to write his own screenplay. That screenplay was brought to the Sundance Institute, and Redford was asked to direct it. However, even Norman Maclean thought his own script wasn't very good, and eventually he assigned the rights to Redford, and I was charged with finding a new writer for it.

King of the Hill, A. E. Hotchner's memoir about growing up in St. Louis during the Depression, was unknown to me, but I was interested in working with Steven Soderbergh after seeing his movie *sex, lies, and videotape.* Hotchner's, it turned out, was a book Soderbergh had always loved.

I am immensely proud of these three movies and of the way they touched their audiences, but I have one regret—I fear that all three failed in making the mothers fully three-dimensional characters. I can't ascribe this to some male plot, and it was not for a lack of trying. In *Ordinary People* I thought the mother was the most indelible person in the story. She was a person so overcome with pain at the loss of her son that she would not allow herself to feel anything at all. That avoidance made her appear cold, even cruel, to her remaining son; but it masked a heartbreaking vulnerability and an unconscious ter-

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ror at being overwhelmed by feeling. She could not see that true survival for herself and her family lay in exposing the pain she worked so hard to control. Her failure was far more tragic than it was villainous.

Mary Tyler Moore had been Redford's first choice to play the mother since he had seen her walking on the beach one day. He had been struck by the difference in persona between her public vitality and the vulnerability he saw in her as she walked alone in the rain. It was exactly the quality that the mother should have—relentlessly "up" and in control in front of others but hiding a profound fragility. This fragility made her sympathetic, despite her coldness to her son.

On screen, however, Mary Tyler Moore somehow came across tougher than we had imagined. The film editor thought this was great. He wanted the mother to be something of a villain, to make the movie more dramatic. He reassured Redford that she would still manage to be sympathetic. As a result, Redford did not shoot a new scene that had been written. It showed the mother talking to her gynecologist, which in itself would have been something of a first, since this most fundamental of relationships to women is rarely if ever shown on screen. In it, the mother refuses to recognize the signs of stress the doctor sees in her. The more sympathetic he is, the more she denies her state of mind and the tears that begin to fall from her eyes. It was a great scene.

When we saw the first rough cut of the movie after the shooting was finished, it was clear that it had been a real mistake not to shoot that scene or some smaller moments that could have shown the terrible price the mother was paying for her rigidity. Redford decided to shoot several of them despite the added expense. Unfortunately, fate intervened in the form of an actors' strike, and the scenes were never shot, leaving some people in the audience unable to understand the mother's complexity. This is a perfect example of the ways in which movies are both collaborative and sometimes accidental in their outcome.

In *A River Runs Through It,* the mother barely exists in the original novella. The challenge in the movie was to invest her with some dignity and dimension, even though she seemed to play such a small role in the actual story. I don't think we were successful in giving her that dimension, but there was a moment when her own awareness of her peripheral role could have been given more emotional effect. It occurred in the voice-over that accompanied the scene in which the Norman Maclean character tells his parents about his brother's death. In it, Norman and his father remain seated while the camera shows the mother moving slowly and painfully up the stairs under the

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tremendous weight of that terrible news she has just heard. Over the scene you can hear Norman's voice, as read by Redford, say: "My mother turned and went to her bedroom where, in a houseful of men and rods and rifles, she had faced most of her great problems alone." It is a line that gives the woman's life a dignity and meaning that one might otherwise miss. Unfortunately, that line was cut from the final version because it theoretically interrupted the flow of the scene. Perhaps it did, but in my opinion something very important was lost. "God is in the details" in the way movies are edited, as in all other things.

As for *King of the Hill*, the poor mother in that movie suffered not only from poverty and an unsympathetic husband but also from tuberculosis. She was potentially the archetypal victim, a characterization I wanted to avoid. Since her son possessed enormous imagination and humor, which were instrumental in his own survival, and since these traits clearly did not come from his taciturn father, his mother was the likely source of them. If she had been funny and inventive even in the face of trauma, it would have made her a less passive character. Unfortunately, my concern was not shared by the director, and victim, I believe, she was, though it did not seem to hurt the film.

Having said this, I also say that, for me, these films connect to all that is best about making movies. In a darkened theater, in the company of others, it is possible to enter completely into another world and there be shaken to our roots, transported, and even transformed. And to sit in an audience while watching a movie you've been part of—hoping that the audience will feel what you feel—is also a terrifying and thrilling experience. With great good luck, if all goes well, the movie takes over, even though you've seen it a hundred times before, and you become one with the audience. That's when you know it has all been worth it.

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Determination

ROBERT PACK

Lost brother, having died the summer death
I might have died, by your own hand,
stilled heart within my heart,
if I assume even my words
have been determined as the cosmic laws
required right from the start,
including my hypothesis today
that I'm determined also
to believe determination is the way
fixed nature operates,
from quarks to quandaries of the mind,
from numbing gloom to stoic pride,
how can I ever know
if what I think is true is true,
despite my best determination to decide?
How can I ever know,
strolling along the breeding lake
that we explored when we were boys, searching
for turtles sunning on their rocks,
for frogs, a water snake,
if my return can free me from the day
you took your shadowed silence with you,
and you stole away.
And if I could return in time as well,
even with what I know,
in thought I'd choose again to be
the same abandoned boy I was—although
he led me where I am today,
hearing across the lake the crack of ice,
which brings back that same summer dawn
you rose from our twin bed,
without a parting word to me,

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and put that silver pistol to you head.
Why you? More inward than I was,
still I believed you loved the orange light
that curled at evening in the pines,
the quick cry of the scarlet tanager,
the congregating goldenrod
and purple aster, signs
of coming autumn's fierce effulgence
in the forest and the hills; you loved
the pulsing northern lights, the sense
of spectacle revealing
there is only spectacle to be revealed—
profusion streaming in the sky,
profusion flowing golden in the field.
So why did flashing colors,
flaring purple, flaring red, the oranges,
the blues and greens and yellows—
anyone who looks can see
swirling the heavens and the earth—
that brought such thoughtless happiness to me,
with no need for a purpose past
appearing to be watched
for sudden red or drizzling gray
transforming into brightened shades of blue—
why, silent brother, in the last
accounting did such spectacle of color not
bring equal happiness to you?
Was it too difficult to look out there
into a universe that seemed
content to be exactly as it was?
Given your inwardness, I fear
your death was unavoidable, and yet
if dad had never brought
that pistol home, and I, so late

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to use it, left it in its cabinet, or tried
to say what I could not have said,
could I have changed your fate?
You put that pistol, oh, up to your head,
determined you would live your death
as your own act of choice,
as if your ingrown silence could at last release
locked words long stifled in my voice.

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A Career at Harvard

OSCAR HANDLIN

As the journal's pages slip away to mark the passing weeks, I count the years gone by. I reckon not from birth but from rebirth, from the one arrival that defined the pattern of my life. And though sixty years and more have altered the whole encompassed scene, I remain fixed in that same place—an experience no longer as common in American academic life as once it was.

In retrospect, innocence may have been the key to my relationship with Harvard University. Early on in life, once I had cleared away misty visions of the rabbinate, I knew what I wanted to do—to write history; and Brooklyn College, scattered among several downtown office buildings, afforded a restless undergraduate ample opportunity to do what he wanted to do. I wandered about, spent more time in libraries than in classrooms, and defined my own interests, which I pursued in my own way. For graduate work my attention focused on medieval history and therefore on Harvard where the scholars whom I had read and admired were: Charles H. Haskins, E. K. Rand, George Sarton, N. S. B. Gras, and Edwin F. Gay.

In May 1934 I decided to look the place over; $3.50 bought me a one-day holiday excursion, New York to Boston and return on the New Haven Railroad, departing from Grand Central at midnight, arriving in South Station at 6:30 A.M. I carried with me a letter of introduction from Jesse Clarkson, the teacher at Brooklyn whom I respected most, to Michael Karpovich, then Harvard's assistant professor of Russian history. After arrival, I dawdled through the terminal, but time passed slowly and the Boston "El" brought me all too quickly to Harvard Square—deadly quiet.

I had no idea of how to go about looking the place over and finally decided to drop in on Professor Karpovich in his home. But then no matter how slowly I trudged over to Trowbridge Street, it was still just short of 8:30 A.M. when I rang the bell of the modest frame house. A child answered; and I asked to see the professor, who appeared be-

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fore very long, somewhat disheveled. I presented my letter and explained my mission. After a moment of puzzlement, Karpovich asked me to wait and withdrew.

In time he returned fully dressed and led me in a long walk down by the river houses, up through the Yard, and into the Widener stacks, a revelation to a student who for years had battled title by title with parsimonious New York librarians reluctant to permit overuse of their treasures. Here it was all at hand for the taking. I could imagine no better fate than to devote my life to doing so.

Karpovich and I had spent the morning talking about history, but he was vague about the mechanics of admission to the graduate school at Harvard. Unfortunately the holiday had closed the university offices (which I should have known but did not); and Crane Brinton, who could tell me everything about the department, was off walking in Vermont.

I risked it all, decided to stay another day, threw away the return half of my railroad ticket, spent the night in the Y, and prepared to go back by bus. Meanwhile there remained Widener to explore.

That much has changed. At Harvard, professors no longer live within walking distance of the Yard; and vigilant secretaries guard them against intrusion by would-be students.

With Brinton the next day, time passed effortlessly in a lively discussion of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. (It did not occur to me to wonder until years later that he and Karpovich should take time to chatter casually with a strange would-be historian. Before I could understand, I had to learn something about what teaching meant.) In time, Brinton got me to see Lawrence Shaw May, assistant dean of the graduate school, a rather dour Yankee but a serious scholar in his own right. We talked awhile about this and that, and then I was in. No forms to complete. No procedures to follow. Just come!

That, too, has changed. Formidable screening devices now keep out all but applicants who match up against predetermined criteria—standardized test scores, course grades from the less important college years, and weary letters of recommendation, everything, that is, but the most important measure: the desire to learn. I doubt that today I would get in.

In my own case, admission only led into the next problem—selection of a program. When I returned to Cambridge in the fall, I discovered my all-star lineup in shambles. Illness, I learned, had ended Haskins's teaching; Gras was at the business school; Rand did only classics; and Sarton concentrated on his own work. I talked with Brinton about his offering in the Enlightenment, which he described

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as a middle-group course taken mostly by undergraduates; I probably would get little from it, he suggested. After he showed me the reading list, I agreed—perhaps too hastily, for the possibility of irony did not occur to me, and I could not recognize or see through the veneer of diffidence Brinton had acquired in Oxford. However, the exchange gained me an invitation to the meetings of the "Star Chamber," an informal discussion group of junior professors and advanced graduate students, from which I learned a great deal.

At formal registration I determined to get my tuition's worth, for no regulation limited the number of courses a student could carry. (Elsewhere, I knew, charges varied with the number of course credits taken—à la carte.) In my first semester I got rid of the Latin, French, and German requirements; and to make the most of Harvard's prix fixe, I enrolled in five courses, three of them seminars; and I prepared four long papers for them, none as good as they should have been. I paid the price of over-reaching in mediocre grades.

Nevertheless, in spite of an uneven record, a kindly providence presided over my destiny; or rather, undistinguished grades did not unduly sway those who judged my performance. Since I asked for little then or later, rewards always exceeded my expectations and appointments followed one another in their due season.

John Hope Franklin, whose career at Harvard overlapped mine, noted in his memoirs an anti-Semitic slur by a graduate student; research in faculty papers has unearthed other comments susceptible to such interpretation. The difficulties at the time of Lionel Trilling and Moses Finley at Columbia, which became known later, did not surprise me. My own immunity to anti-Semitism at Harvard in the 1930s I ascribed to two factors. I was who I was and made no secret of my identity: take me or leave me. And any among my peers and professors who groped for a stereotype more often picked on Brooklyn rather than on Jewishness to place me. Jokes about the Dodgers and Toid Avenue accents usual in late-night conviviality may have masked other references. If so, I was oblivious to the possibility. And no such prejudice ever affected my dealings with teachers and later colleagues. The best entrenched Yankees—Samuel Eliot Morison, Kenneth B. Murdock, and Elliott Perkins—leaned over backward to take me in.

Because I considered learning its own reward, ancillary financial arrangements seemed peripheral, so that I can scarcely comprehend the salary and benefits anxieties of the 1990s. My mind drifts back some fifty years and more to a point at which I considered the offer of a Harvard appointment or rather of a renewal of an annual appointment. A letter from the chairman of the History Department (May 19,

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1941) offered me the same $2,000 annual salary for 1941–42 as for the preceding year (1940–41), with the proviso that the salary would shrink to $1,500 should enrollment in the department decline. To one reared during the depression and familiar with deprivation, the proposal seemed utterly reasonable—no question of benefits was even conceivable. And besides, the university only paid me to do what I wanted to do anyway and what I would have done at any wage or none.

My nuttiness persisted. Thirteen years later I received an attractive offer from the University of Chicago at what I estimated amounted to four times my Harvard salary. I took the proposal to McGeorge Bundy, then dean of the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences. We commiserated with each other. He pleaded helplessness but pointed out that three of my senior colleagues—Samuel Eliot Morison, Frederick Merk, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., all the same age—were about to retire, all at once. And my departure would ruin the American history wing of the department. Hence it was essential that I stay, although the faculty was in no position to match Chicago's offer. The argument seemed utterly plausible to me and brought me nothing but a sense of urgency to keep the instruction going. In the years that followed, I never asked for, or even discussed, any compensation. Hence my bewilderment when young scholars turn down appointments because of inadequacies in the benefit package, allowing marginal differences in the terms of retirement decades away to shape their careers.

I drew comfort not only from the *Veritas* emblazoned on its shield, but even more from my knowledge of Harvard's history. Here in the wilderness, the first founders planted an institution that grew in unanticipated ways. That poor pilgrim people, their estates much wasted, in erecting a college sought to make the whole world understand that spiritual learning was the thing they chiefly desired. To enlist in their company seemed reward enough to me.

Teaching and learning, therefore, both counted as one to me, and especially in the early pre-war years when only a matter of months separated me in age from my students. Little Hall, appropriately shabby and before long destined to make way for a brutal concrete structure, supplied a congenial setting for tutorial instruction. No one told me how to do it. Tutorial lacked a syllabus or structure, except for the goal set by the general examinations administered to seniors. Since the ultimate judgment of each undergraduate rested in the hands of outsiders who composed and graded the general examinations, a common interest united student and tutor. Shared ignorance was a bond when it came to working up a field I had never

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studied—Greek history, for instance. I learned, perhaps more than they did, as the hours passed in conversation—no bells, no schedule. (Radcliffe created a different situation; in a neat little "Tutorial House" on Appian Way, rooms without doors chilled the atmosphere.)

One with one—thus in time I dealt also with advanced students even in graduate seminars, small in size and intensely concentrated on the research report each participant delivered. The instructor listened unobtrusively with only an occasional intrusion to keep the discussion focused until a closing summation.

One with one—even more so when it came to the dissertation. I refused to comply with pleas that I suggest a topic. I knew, as the candidates did not, what years of drudgery lay before them, eased for the most fortunate only by the desire to find answers to questions only they themselves could phrase. And then, with notes assembled—would come the agony of formulating propositions that arranged themselves in chapters put together from words in sentences to convey meaning, a process with which the bystander could sympathize but offer only occasional editorial suggestions.

As it happened, my most active teaching years coincided with the return of highly motivated veterans eager for graduate study in history. As it happened also, the same years saw the appearance in my study of a half-dozen truly exceptional women who would go on to the doctorate and hold their own in competition with the veterans. Many of these graduate students, male and female, were about the same age as I. To keep up with them took considerable effort because they went wherever their own interests led, so that I had to work hard to stay abreast, learning while presuming to teach. Thus I discovered the clue—that teaching meant learning, a reward more precious than wages or benefits.

Yet while struggling not to fall behind a brilliant generation of young scholars, I faced, at the same time, the need to convey information and ideas to undergraduates with no professional interest in the subject. That obligation added another dimension to teaching, as if constantly describing for graduates an event viewed from within in the context of its inner mechanism and, at the same time, describing it for undergraduates as viewed from without in the context of what transpired about it.

Therefore, I never delivered the same lecture twice; nor did I tie myself to a written text, for much depended upon the faces before me. However large the class, I got to know the individuals, not by name but by expression—puzzlement, enlightenment, interest, boredom. Since in teaching I simply allowed my own efforts to learn to

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spill over to others, I believed that students could share in the process of discovery. It therefore never occurred to me to employ any audio-visual aid; no picture, map, or chart could match in vividness the imagination—mine and theirs. Never did I make an effort to amuse or entertain. All such techniques seemed to me to diminish from the seriousness of our enterprise, to divert attention from the ultimate goal.

Since I often found that the most apt way of teaching was by listening, in tutorials and small discussion groups, I tolerated long periods of silence until embarrassment drove the students to say something and thereby open a channel to learning. In lecturing I discovered the equivalent by insisting on listening to myself as the audience did, and by asking as well as by answering questions. That meant that I would never read a lecture or bind myself to a text in which the lines flowed along out of control.

My good fortune grew out of peculiarities in my own situation. Never did I offer a course that was required or useful to some other end. No student attended because the regulations compelled him or her to be there or because that specific course was instrumental to any other purpose. Everyone there appeared because he or she wished to. On the day of the great student strike of 1970 at Harvard, I proceeded as usual to the lecture hall, already comfortably full at my arrival. From the podium I noticed one of the strike leaders, notebook at the ready. I came down, approached him, and asked whether he had called off the strike.

"No," he answered. "But I'm not taking the course for credit, just auditing."

Fortunately, too, I was able to shun popularity. In 1963 when the attendance in my course American Social History got up above the four hundred mark, I ceased to offer it. I did not believe that an earnest desire for that kind of knowledge really moved that many undergraduates; and I feared that these lectures had become one of those experiences into which people drifted out of habit or reputation. Therefore, I chose subjects which on the face of it were not likely to draw crowds; I insisted on a whole year's commitment, non-divisable; and I offered my courses at an hour that required students either to postpone or skip their lunch.

I tried to impart the same quality to examinations, which I regarded as an occasion for summation rather than as a probe of remembered details. In the early days, tutoring schools still dotted Massachusetts Avenue and Mt. Auburn Street. Collectively known as "the Widow," they pumped a few weeks of information into the indolent—enough to float the moderately intelligent by the finals. The

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Widow's success depended in part on skill in drills and ir
ability to predict the contents of the tests. For some of r
the contest with the cram schools overshadowed asses
students' learning, so that examinations tended, year by year, t
come ever more recondite. I refused to follow that course. If the Widow could help the dullards remember, so be it. Factual details alone would not help unless embedded in some larger theme; and my finals aimed to stimulate the students to integrate their information in response to the challenge of a statement in a remote source. My examinations aimed to probe the quality of such thought. Years later they lodged in the memories of returning alumni, or so I have often been told.

Americans lack the cushions provided by other societies to absorb the shock of a steadily widening gap between the teachers and the taught. Recognizing that youth and age were not the same, Europeans created graceful modes by which the older and the younger, year by year, accommodated to the turnings of the seasons. Loveable, irrascible, motherly, Mr. Chips, Copey, Miss Grant, the various patterns recognized the way in which change still left the elderly a function. An era that glorifies youth, however, permits no such transitions. The teachers come to dread the effects of aging, and in personal styles as well as in relationships to others they hasten to cover up the differences. Accommodations in hair, dress, and language wish the calendar away. Fashion, moreover, extends beyond these matters, which are, after all, personal. Fashion also intrudes into politics, tastes in literature and music, and in modes of behavior. Keeping up with father has given way to keeping up with son.

Histrionic temptations always influenced our "bow-wows" who fashioned "gut" courses to raise audience share. But the effects become more serious when they combine, as they increasingly have, with the ratings game, which increasingly dominates collegiate course offerings. The deans and their luxuriating staffs studiously examine enrollment figures in setting budgets. In almost all institutions, requirements are out; free choice is in. And to meet such requirements as survive, the consumer can select from a range of alternative courses. Various buying guides direct the learner to the best bargains, while official and unofficial modes of rating calibrate the performance of those with wares to purvey. Like all such consumer guides, these are fallible—it all depends upon what the viewer wishes to tune in on.

Dependence upon the ratings produces the same effect in a teacher as in an anchorman—anxiety. For the young performers the strain is bad enough; they must keep an eye fixed upon enrollment

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figures to preserve their jobs. For older teachers in analogous situations, the need for vigilance is fully as serious; the distinguished scholar with an international reputation, who for years lectured to a class of two hundred, suddenly finds his audience dwindle to fifteen as a result of a snide, ill-informed, comment in a tip sheet. Those unwilling to play to the crowd all too often surrender to disgust or cynicism and give up as they serve out the years to retirement. Or worse still, they do try. Feebly they interject little jokes to liven up the hour. They inflate their grades. They lighten their reading assignments.

Some years ago, conforming to an old tradition, I attended the last lecture of a distinguished colleague. For a long time his had been the most popular course in the college, enjoying the largest undergraduate enrollment. On this occasion, the hall was half-empty. But as the hour proceeded, young men and women continued to drop in; on the other hand, some left well before the closing bell. Here and there a belated breakfaster sipped a coke or munched a doughnut. Some students conscientiously took notes. Others idly turned the pages of the morning newspaper. Through it all the lecturer proceeded to his peroration—immured by a solid wall of despair.

In time, I concluded that teaching had lost the meaning I had once imparted to it. The Lowell Lecture Hall closed down; and renovation stripped the rooms in Sever, Harvard, and Emerson of the old benches embellished with hand-carved initials inscribed by generations of note takers. To replace the old forms there came row upon row of plastic seats appropriate to a second-run movie theater that enforces no dress code. Student quality drifted down, perhaps not in terms of scores or self-esteem, but certainly in terms of willingness to follow a sustained line of thought or ability to venture beyond high-school slogans. I could teach but no longer learn.

A comparable rot set in among graduate students. Very likely, law, business, medicine, and mathematics continued to attract applicants as qualified as ever; but history—a discipline already in crisis—failed to do so. Attractive five-year fellowships in 1964 brought Harvard the pick of the nation's graduating seniors. They arrived in Cambridge clutching credentials—outstanding course records and sterling letters of recommendation. They lacked only the desire to learn. Since they had been good students, they knew all the answers and wished only to express themselves—fledgling journalists, as it were. "Take it easy," was the usual greeting of my last graduate student, who excelled in the art. The cozy fellowships proved disastrous—yielding not one product worthy of the effort invested in them. (Years of reading the products of peer review—whether in applications for Fulbright grants

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or postgraduate fellowships—left me skeptical of the process; and only frustration greeted my efforts to assess the extent to which grantees fulfilled the conditions of their awards.)

Nor in the decades that followed 1964 did the History Department at Harvard seem likely to replenish its ranks at an acceptable level. Increasingly, bureaucratic obstacles threatened to impede the recruitment of such professors as Bernard Bailyn, Donald Fleming, Frank Freidel, E. R. May, and Richard Pipes for whose appointment I had been primarily responsible. In those cases, the department had stressed youthful vigor, some publications that demonstrated creative ability along an upward trajectory, and, above all, "zest." The present-day rituals of "blind letters," of public announcements that elicit hundreds of futile applications, and of successions of one-hour lectures now condemn these searches to futility, except in fields like ancient and medieval history, which demand at least some competence in languages. I could not anticipate the distortions produced by affirmative action or by the temerity of a dean who ordered the department to appoint a woman—any woman.

The overall tone of Harvard turned hostile or at best apathetic to scholarly values, now deemed less worthy than the pressing tasks of doing good for the world with the aid of a rising tide of federal support. North of the Yard, the scientists and, across the river, the M.D.'s and the business administrators did their work in detachment. But at the center, the power and the glory went to the Kennedy School of Government, which provided a refuge for out-of-office politicians and for bureaucrats on leave. The Graduate School of Education, which had long since ceased to train teachers, devoted itself to airy general problems of redesigning the schools and restructuring society. Insidious influences from such sources cast a somber shadow over the prospects for learning.

I turned with relief, therefore, to a succession of non-instructional positions more likely than teaching to advance the cause of scholarship should the dry season some day come to an end. For many years I had served as one of the syndics of the Harvard University Press, responsible for maintaining academic standards in approving manuscripts for publication. For a briefer period I had been a member of the Board of Directors, which exercised fiscal oversight on operations. In 1972 the appearance of a deficit touched off the alarm bells among administrators, who were in any case dubious of university publishing. Surely Boston and New York, even Philadelphia and Chicago possessed enough commercial houses to bring the works of Harvard professors into print. President Conant had earlier proposed to abolish the University Press, and President Bok in 1972 may have

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toyed with the same idea—enough to alarm the Association of American University Presses, which issued a ringing manifesto in favor of preserving these instruments of academic learning.

Probably not in response, but to gain time for considering his options, President Bok asked me to serve as acting director while he decided what to do. The moment was not propitious for me. I had already accepted appointment as Harmsworth Professor at Oxford, so the new assignment called for a transatlantic commute (at my own expense).

The results justified the effort. I eased staff fears stoked by rumors of the AAUP statement that their positions might soon vanish. In good conscience I could promise stability, for a substantial income from endowment assured the future of the Press, even in the face of some current losses. Other problems also yielded to rational consideration, as for instance, the tripartite arrangement among the Press, the Classics Department, and Heinemann (London) for publishing the Loeb Classical Library. Above all, I stressed the primacy of the Board of Syndics in establishing editorial policy. When a permanent director took office, I had no doubt about the future of the Press as an instrument of scholarship.

The experience proved valuable when a different kind of emergency made me director of the Harvard University Library, an ungainly structure—almost one hundred units reaching into all the faculties—but a priceless research instrument. Substantial endowments supported many but not all the collections, which also drew upon the resources of each of the faculties.

Diplomacy was the first obligation of the University Library director. Each of the deans as well as the president of the university feared the gaping holes in their budgets that uncontrolled library costs might create. I understood their concern and assured them that firm controls were in place. More difficult to ease were the concerns with status of the invaluable professional librarians, considered not just staff yet also not quite faculty. Years as a user of their services left me persuaded of their value as well as the depth of their knowledge. But it took frequent reassurance and the willingness energetically to redress their grievances large and small to convey the sense that the university understood their situation and valued their contributions.

Diplomacy on a narrower scale occupied a good deal of my attention. Each of our libraries possessed rare books and manuscripts, safeguarded in treasure rooms—law, business, medicine, and divinity, with Houghton pre-eminent among them. Support for acquisitions came from generous donors who generally wished the collections treated as museums, roped off from casual onlookers. On the other

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hand, operating funds came largely from the unrestricted faculty resources; and concerned professors wished some voice in collection policy and also easier access to the holdings for themselves and for their students. Months of delicate negotiation prevented an open clash until a gradual change in Houghton's management made way for an acceptable modus vivendi, so that now appropriate classes meet regularly in the library, where students can actually learn by laying hold of early manuscripts and incunabula.

One failure and two successes marked my involvement in more modern library problems. A proposal long languished in Congress to staunch the hemorrhage by which uncontrolled serial prices drained away research library resources. A national periodicals center such as already served British readers could make desired specialized materials available to readers everywhere from a reduced number of copies. For precisely that reason, publishers opposed the proposal and killed it. My enthusiastic support counted for nothing. Serial costs remain a problem.

On the other hand, I knew enough to drag my feet when it came to computerizing the catalogs. A unified catalog not only would serve the needs of readers throughout the university but would also improve management by making each unit aware of acquisitions in the others. Throughout the United States, libraries hastily invested time, effort, and money in the effort to develop an on-line cataloging system; and two rival nation-wide consortia aimed to provide an overarching national system. As the largest potential user, we maintained good relations with everyone but, whatever the temptations, refrained from any total commitment. Instead, our initial step put our own house in order by developing a distributable union catalog of all our collections on microfiche. The experience enabled us to select an on-line system already developed at Northwestern and to adapt it to our own needs. We passed up the chance for a radical new discovery in favor of solid development of a proven pattern. In time, HOLLIS, our own on-line system, appeared—moderate in cost, requiring no interruption of continuing scholarship, and quickly integrated into current learning patterns.

The computer permitted the library to grapple with the persistent problem of space. Year by year, acquisitions mounted while the number of volumes discarded remained minuscule. When I drifted through it in 1934, Widener held practically everything the college possessed—fine arts, music, science, newspapers, government documents, and undergraduate reading rooms. In subsequent years, much of that material was transferred into separate buildings—Houghton, Lamont, Pusey, and Fogg—yet still the crowding continued and mov-

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able shelving did not help. My experience at the Press suggested remote storage as the solution, and HOLLIS provided the means of retrieval of any volume within twenty-four hours. We sacrificed the freedom to browse through the stacks but gained space for decades of future growth.

In the vast playing field that the multiversity has become, numerous people scurry about, all doing their own job, with only a few unifying links inherited from the past. Inertia, vague sentimental traditions, and catchphrases whose origins few recall trickle through among the players.

But here and there a survival recalls an earlier commitment: someone put these stones in place, gathered up these materials in an organized fashion, for some purpose. And now and then the monuments to scholarly endeavor will draw the curious in to explore the wonders of learning.

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The Library of Our Dreams

JASPER GRIFFIN

"TYRANTS ARE CULTURED because they keep company with cultured men," is a famous line from a lost play by Euripides. The first such cultured men in Greece were poets and singers (which were one and the same, at that early date); and in the Homeric poems we find bards performing their epic songs at the court of the king of the Phaeacians and in the palace of Odysseus on Ithaca. Many scholars have guessed that the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was himself a court bard; or, at least, that he would have liked to be one.

The immediately succeeding period, the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., saw the rise all over Greece of those unconstitutional rulers, seizing power and retaining it essentially by force, whom the Greeks called by the foreign name *turannos*: or as we say, tyrant. The twentieth century has seen plenty of coups and the installation of plenty of dictators, part military and part demagogue, on very much this model. Some of these men, like some of the despots of Renaissance Italy, went in for patronage of the arts. The spectacular Polycrates of Samos entertained at his court the lyric poets of the day (circa 540–520 B.C.), and so, more memorably, did the tyrants of Athens, Pisistratus and his sons.

It was in fact these Athenian tyrants who used literature to bolster their own popularity with the people, arranging for public recitations of the Homeric poems, which had been hitherto accessible only to the leisured class, and making the arrangements for the first performances of a radically new form, tragedy, which took the old legends, the subject matter of the epic recitations, and dramatized them for performance by actors in the theater. That was an epoch-making innovation, and in the hands of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the new form was to go on developing, under the democratic constitution that succeeded the fall of the tyrant dynasty in 510, in unimagined directions.

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After 500 B.C., mainland Greece rid itself of rule by tyrants, a name originally free of bad overtones (poets applied it to Zeus) that had come to have extremely sinister connotations because of the typical behavior of the men who held such positions. Only on the fringes of the Greek world did they survive, notably in Sicily, where the tyrants of the great city of Syracuse patronized poets in the fifth century (Aeschylus went to Sicily to work for them, and he actually died there); in the fourth century they amused themselves by extending their patronage, now that the age of verse was over and that of prose had begun, to Plato and other philosophers. Plato and Dionysius, the Sicilian tyrant, parted with anger and recriminations on both sides; the relationship of literary man and powerful patron was not an easy one.

Tyrants typically ruled a single city. The careers of Philip II of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great, conqueror of the vast Persian Empire, put an end to the age of the independence of the cities. From now on Greece was to be ruled by kings, each the heir to as much of Alexander's conquests as he had been able to grab, hereditary rulers of extensive states. These men were Macedonians by origin. They came, that is, from a society only half Hellenized and in important respects less advanced culturally: for instance, a Macedonian aristocrat was not allowed to recline at dinner, in the Greek fashion, until he had killed a wild boar in the hunt. That could be a serious embarrassment for a military man of mature years, who might and did find himself exposed to humiliation every evening if he had not slain his boar. Some of the kings devoted themselves to war, others to pleasure, and some to educational and cultural interests. Philip himself, we remember, had employed Aristotle to tutor his son.

Chief among the cultured kings were the Ptolemies of Egypt. Every member of the dynasty bore the name of its founder, and they had to be kept distinct by the use of additional titles: "the Sister-loving," "the Father-loving," "the New Dionysus," "the Manifest God." The first three Ptolemies were men of ability. The founder, "the Savior," seems to have summoned from Athens a philosopher and writer, Demetrius of Phalerum, to advise him about the setting up of his cultural institutions. This man had been a member of the school of Aristotle; and Aristotle had collected a great many books and used them for such scholarly projects as the systematic description and analysis of the political constitutions of a hundred and fifty Greek city-states.

It was from this background that Demetrius came to help King Ptolemy. The result of their joint activity—though Demetrius soon fell out with the king and was dismissed—was the establishment of two of the celebrated features of Alexandria, the Museum and the

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Library. The Museum was not a set of exhibition halls for the display of works of art or natural curiosities, a sense that the word was to acquire later, though Ptolemy did have a zoo. It was an association of learned men and at least nominally a religious foundation, which collectively worshipped the Muses, patrons of the arts, and literature; its head, appointed by the king, was "priest of the Muses." We know of other places where there was a museum that acted, on a smaller scale, as a center of literary and cultural activities. The most important reason for the choice of a framework of this kind was, no doubt, the fact that Plato's famous school at Athens was formally an association for the worship of the Muses, too. The school of Aristotle came to have the same legal form. The Museum at Alexandria possessed, apparently, quite extensive buildings, including a portico, a covered walk (it is tempting to call it a cloister), and a common dining hall for the learned men (no women) who were assembled from far and near to work in it—and to squabble, according to unfriendly ancient sources, "in the bird-cage of the Muses." Tenured and subsidized scholars have never been entirely popular, especially when most of them are foreigners.

These men were officially referred to, we discover from documents that mention them, as "those who dine tax-free in the Museum." Continental classicists have always thought of the whole setup as "like an Oxford College," and the analogy with the Oxford of an older day is a tempting one: "We dine untaxed, untroubled, under / The portrait of our pious founder," to quote an Oxford poem of the eighteenth century. Another point of similarity with the English universities of that distant time is that the members of the Museum seem to have been under little pressure to teach; except that in some cases the head of the Library acted as the official tutor of the crown prince. A final point of great importance is that the Museum seems to have had its own endowment, coming of course from the royal purse, from the beginning. In this way the Ptolemies showed themselves wiser than those benefactors and founders of academic institutions, down to our own day, for whom the vitally necessary step of allowing the college its financial autonomy sometimes proves too difficult.

In the Museum we hear of studies in literary and linguistic matters and in the sciences, both physical and biological. The great mathematician Archimedes of Syracuse spent some time at Alexandria; advanced work went on there in medicine and also in mechanics. Machines worked by steam were devised, but they were not put to serious or productive purposes. At least equally famous was the great Library, which was in the same premises. The ancient kingdoms of the Hittites and Assyrians in the Near East had possessed impressive archives with

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literature in several languages; the Library of the Ptolemies seems to have been created in ignorance of that distant background, and the Greeks had no interest in books in any language but their own. To suit their passionate but resolutely monoglot desire for information, Babylonians and Egyptians and Jews began to produce books that explained the history and culture of these peoples in the Greek language and in something like the familiar forms of Greek historical writing. Some of them have come down to us.

The famous story that the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek—the Septuagint which we still possess—on the order of King Ptolemy II, who was anxious to possess them in his Library, is not now believed (though the name "Septuagint," in Latin "Seventy," survives from the legend that seventy Jewish scholars were assembled and secluded by the king until the translation was complete). In fact, the work must have been done for the needs of the large and increasingly Greek-speaking Jewish community of Alexandria; but the legend preserves something of the strong effect made by the collecting fever of the kings of Egypt.

There had been celebrated collections of books in the Greek world before that of Alexandria. The poet Euripides was sometimes alleged to have been the first to possess a "library," an assertion that seems to have implied that his poetry was unduly and pretentiously learned and perhaps also that he was guilty of plagiarism. Aristotle clearly had an important library. But the Library of the Ptolemies in Alexandria was a new thing. It was associated with scholarly positions, and it served as a resource for scholars and poets; it apparently aimed to be complete; and a catalogue was produced that was a pioneering work in literary history. Later public libraries, in Rome and elsewhere, were explicitly modeled on it.

We have virtually nothing in the way of remains of those fascinating buildings, the Museum and the Library; and in general the ancient city is dishearteningly difficult to excavate. Changes in the level of the land and in the coastline mean that some of the ancient city is now under water. Other parts have been and still are intensely occupied and have suffered every sort of rebuilding, demolition, and change of use and shape. We are therefore forced to rely heavily on accounts of the city from ancient writers. The most readable modern book is E. M. Forster's *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (1922; third edition, 1961). Forster was a friend of the Alexandrian poet C. P. Cavafy, and he knew and loved Alexandria as a cosmopolitan city. He says, hopefully, "The old foreign elements remain, and it is to the oldest of them, the Greek, that she owes such modern culture as is to be found in her." Our age of nationalism and ethnic

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cleansing has done away with all that. A very learned account of all aspects of the Hellenistic city, including the Library, is P. M. Fraser's *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford, 1972, three volumes). The Library and its scholars are well discussed by Rudolf Pfeiffer in his *History of Classical Scholarship*, Volume 1 (Oxford, 1968).

The word for *Library* in Greek was *bibliotheke*—the word that survives for *library* in French and Italian. Its basic meaning is "bookstore," and there is reason to suppose that it was in fact a book stack (as we should say), not a reading room, and that the books were taken off and read in the other buildings of the Museum. They were not in the form of our modern books: that form, often called by its Latin name of *codex*, was throughout antiquity regarded as unworthy to be used for literature, or indeed for books proper, and was employed only for such humbler purposes as rough notes and the keeping of accounts.

Real books were in the classic and respectable form of the papyrus roll, which was unrolled from right to left by the reader as the work was perused from left to right. Unwieldy and inconvenient, and also very uneconomical, it remained the only possible form for literature. It was left for the Christians, with their aggressively disrespectful attitude towards the pagan decencies, to write the venerable works of their religion in book form. We can think of partial parallels in the aversion of some Renaissance patrons to printed books, horribly vulgar and soulless things in comparison with manuscripts, and in the attitude of some people nowadays to paperbacks. Readers are a conservative lot.

A roll typically held one tragedy or comedy; we nowadays buy seven plays per volume in the Oxford Classical Texts volumes. That is a great saving of space. When we add that the ancients possessed more than seventy plays by Aeschylus, where we have only seven, and a hundred and twenty by Sophocles, of which again only seven have come down to us, we begin to see how much space was necessary for the accommodation on rolls of the whole of Greek literature as it existed at that time. There are many authors, known to us by name or by quotations, of whom we possess no works at all. We have, it is depressing to reflect, only a tiny fraction of the literature of ancient Greece.

All books, of course, were hand-written. Consequently their price was always high, since many man-hours had gone into their production. The kings of Egypt were in a privileged position in having a staff of scribes and a virtual monopoly of the Greek world's supply of papyrus, which could be hard to come by elsewhere. This made it possible, as we read in the works of the medical writer Galen, for the Ptolemies to issue an order that any book on a ship that put in at

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Alexandria might be impounded, copied, retained, and the copy returned to the owners. Every copying of a book introduces corruptions and mistakes into the text—a generalization that can be tested any time one has to copy out a page of text oneself. The ancient world repeated with a thrill of disapproval how the king borrowed from the city of Athens the official state texts of the works of the three classic tragedians—that such texts should exist shows the extent of anxiety about textual purity—putting down the enormous sum of fifteen talents as a deposit for their safe return; and how he then had magnificently sumptuous copies made by his staff and gave them to the Athenians instead, keeping the originals in the Library. We hear also of the production of fakes and forgeries to cater to the insatiable appetite and inexhaustible purse of the Ptolemies. None of which will come as any surprise to anyone at all interested in contemporary collecting.

We have seen that an interest in culture was one of the traditional ways of putting a gloss of dignity and worth on the raw fact of the possession of power, and that it was pursued by the first Ptolemies. Another was entering chariots in the races at the great athletic festivals of Old Greece, as the fifth-century tyrants had done; it was then possible to commission a poet like Pindar to immortalize the victory in verse. The Ptolemies did some of that, too, and we possess part of a curious poem written to glorify such an occasion by the court poet Callimachus, an important person to whom we shall return. The cultural activities of the kings of Egypt can thus be seen as following a long-established tradition.

There was more to them than that, however. The Macedonians and Greeks in Egypt, like those in other parts of the former Persian Empire (we find Greek cities, complete with every detail of Greekness, as far afield as Afghanistan), were a thin layer superimposed on a vast alien population, with its own ways and attitudes. Their reaction to this was, in many cases, to cling all the more closely to their Hellenic cultural identity and to emphasize it even more vehemently than they had done at home. Modern parallels are not hard to think of. For all the erudition amassed and catalogued and written about by the scholars of Alexandria, it is hard to find a trace of interest in anything Egyptian. Even the names of the Egyptian gods, whom it would seem hard to avoid mentioning, are conspicuous by their absence in the extensive remains of the scholarship and the poetry produced there. On the other hand, interest in the fine detail of every local cult, custom, and legend of the motherland is everywhere.

In this light, it is not hard to understand the impulse to collect as much as possible of the literature of Greece and to work it into a

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coherent history, settling questions of authenticity, ascription, chronology, and textual correctness. In their creative period, the Greeks had shown little interest in the niceties of textual criticism, or even of literary history. Our ignorance about the biography of many Greek writers is almost complete; that goes back to the failure of those near them in time to be interested enough to write anything about them. That is why our histories of literature still like to tell us (since Nature abhors a vacuum) that Aeschylus met his death when an eagle dropped a tortoise on his head, and that Plato was born and died on the sacred day of Apollo, and that Alcaeus tried to make love to Sappho. Hard as it is for us to imagine, that was an age when what people wanted was the actual works of poets, not spicy biographies. That taste came later, in a less artistically creative time; it had to be met largely by invention.

The book rolls flooded into Alexandria. Their mass meant that some sorting was imperative: at first, simply to make it possible to find what was there; but later, to reduce to order and historical sense all those writers and their various works. And the discovery of variants between the text of different copies of a work, and the presence among them of writings that on inspection looked spurious, or of more than one work claiming the same authorship and title—all these things cried out for the invention of textual scholarship. This double challenge was met, with momentous consequences. Both literary history and textual criticism came to birth to deal with the unprecedented problems and opportunities presented by the holdings of the Library and the presence of learned men in the Museum.

The representative figure of Alexandrian literature is Callimachus. Born in Cyrene, the old Greek foundation on the North African coast (none of the early scholars and poets was born in Alexandria), he combined an omnivorous taste for literary scholarship with a keen wit and an extraordinary flair for poetry that exploited his learning in all sorts of unexpected and ingenious ways. He was evidently a combative personality, who attacked contemporaries freely and was much attacked in his turn. It is not at all easy to give the flavor of his writings in a short space and in translation. His stylistic manifesto was that a poet should not try to compete with the established classics of the remote past, as some were still trying to do, and—above all—should avoid like the plague whatever was hackneyed, predictable, "fat." The poet should exploit all the accumulated riches of the past, but his Muse should be thin, and the poem should be kaleidoscopic, constantly changing in tone, pace, and subject.

It is important to see the difference between a librarian poet like Callimachus and one like Philip Larkin, who was Librarian of the

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University of Hull. Larkin's poetry, colloquial and unliterary, shows no trace of his other activity, and he liked to ask Philistine questions such as "Who is Jorge Luis Borges?" Librarianship was simply the way he made a living. Callimachus wrote a large number of books on various subjects: for example, *Changes of Name of Islands and Cities*, which discussed the various myths and legends he came across, in which nymphs and heroes had by their stories given one name or another to some place; and *The Rivers of the World*, which brought together historical and legendary information about them. In his poetry he turned the same material to account.

In his *Hymn to Zeus*, Callimachus dealt with the birth of the god, dwelling with arch humor and display of erudition on the piquant contrast between the god and the baby—"and there, o divine one, did your navel fall off: whence that place is called The Navel for ever more"—and since it was generally said that Zeus was born in Crete, he chooses the more recherché version, that it was in Arcadia. "Cretans are always liars," he observes, quoting the paradox of Epimenides the Cretan (paradox: if a Cretan says "I am lying," he is lying, whether or not he is telling the truth—or is he?). At that time, he goes on, Arcadia was waterless. It was indeed called Azenis, "parched land." So Zeus's mother Rhea could find no water to wash herself and the newborn baby. He develops the theme:

> Not yet flowed mighty Ladon, nor the fall
> Of Erymanthus, whitest stream of all;
> Azenis parching lay, though history
> Would call her soon "well-watered Arcady":
> Soon, but not yet. When Rhea's travail neared,
> Many the oaks Iaon moist upreared,
> Many the wagons Melas had to bear;
> Above Carion adders built their lair,
> Where all is water now; the traveler spent
> O'er Crathis and Metope's shingle went,
> And went athirst, that water underfoot . . .

The obscure names of inconsiderable streams are presented with straight-faced humor and ingenious variation, as if they were mighty rivers; and the whole passage is suggested by the discovery of some old poetical source, which spoke of Arcadia under another name, since changed. We see the learned poet putting his book learning to work in his poetry.

Such poetry is clearly in an important sense secondary. It is not only that the poet is exploiting the accumulated literary riches of the past. It is also that he makes it clear that all this is a game: a civilized and ironic game that demands of the reader a familiarity with older

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literature and with the charmingly naive ideas that it embodied of the gods and the world. There can be no question of serious belief in Zeus being expressed in such a style. Poetry, in fact, has ceased (in the most urbane manner imaginable) to be the vehicle of serious thought and statement as it had been for the epic and lyric and dramatic and philosophical poets of the past; it has become an optional extra, a civilized pleasure for educated people. It has become, in fact, what it is in the modern world.

Technically a virtuoso, Callimachus writes in many different forms, meters, and dialects. The whole of earlier literature lies open in his poems, and it is revealing that he can pick and choose among the different literary genres that had been evolved in earlier times to serve the different occasions, religious and social, that were features of Greek life. It was fundamental to Greek literature that for each type of occasion certain poetical forms and meters were felt to be appropriate. Heroic narratives, epitaphs, songs of celebration at weddings and of lament at funerals, poems in praise of athletic victors, and so on: each came to have a canonical metrical form. It is characteristic of the work of Callimachus and his contemporaries such as Theocritus that they deny or confuse those generic expectations.

A hymn, not in hexameters but in elegiac couplets, and in a dialect not associated with that meter, too; a victory poem, recalling the lyric poems of Pindar but composed in couplets; an elegy on a dead princess, not in couplets but in a striking lyric meter—such were some of the surprises Callimachus sprang on his cultured readers. It is natural to associate this unprecedented freedom in the face of the tradition with his equally unprecedented access to that tradition: in written form, and all on offer, not as the expression of a particular city at a particular time or of a particular occasion in a society in which they played predictable institutionalized roles, but as books, all equally available for use, combination, and innovation. These poets can pick and choose, mix and match. The tradition is cherished as never before, but in a foreign country and in a great library it is now in a way no longer alive—or at least it is living in a very different sense.

The other great venture of Callimachus was a systematic catalogue, in prose, of Greek literature, with the title *Tables of those distinguished in every Kind of Literature and of their Works.* A massive opus, it consisted of 120 Books. We can see from the pitifully exiguous fragments we possess that it dealt with questions of authorship, authenticity, and chronology. Authors were listed by genres, alphabetically, each one apparently receiving a brief biographical note, and a list of his or her writings, quoting the opening words of each, and indicating its

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length. It is a sad loss for us that we have almost none of this epoch-making work, which was the basis of all subsequent Greek literary history.

So much, then, for the first of our two challenges. The second, that of purifying and defending the texts from corruption, was taken up by other Alexandrian scholars. That helpful activity for the exact study of the text, the creation of special dictionaries and works of reference, went hand in hand with textual criticism in the strict sense, first with Zenodotus, then with Aristophanes of Byzantium, and finally with the man whose name became synonymous with textual work, Aristarchus. These men found themselves confronted with large numbers of manuscripts of some works, especially the Homeric poems. On inspection they revealed all sorts of variants: omissions, repetitions, alternative readings, different arrangements. The art of textual criticism came into existence to cope with this situation, with marginal signs to draw attention to difficulties, and a consistent attempt to establish and justify the text. We have quite a lot of information about their establishment of the text of the *Iliad*, in particular.

The Alexandrian scholars have at some periods been treated with ingratitude and even ridicule by some generations of later critics, and it is often difficult to make out whether a given reading is being proposed or supported by them because it occurred in manuscripts now lost to us, or only on grounds of taste, because Zenodotus or Aristarchus liked or approved of it. That is the crucial question for us; but we cannot blame the Alexandrians for our frequent inability to answer it, as all we have is not their actual words, with such explanations as they may have given, but the mere report of their preferences given by other, later writers. It seems likely that their criticism was sometimes subjective, but they did succeed in creating and bequeathing to the book trade a set of standard texts that were, on the whole, a good deal better than what we can find of what went before; and they equipped them with commentaries and notes that defended the text and made corruption more difficult. And when has textual criticism not been subjective?

They also had another, no less momentous consequence. This was the period in which the Jews were most under the influence of the Greek world and culture that surrounded them. One of its effects was that Jewish scribes began to emulate Greek scribal techniques and terminology, adopting the same standard of verbal accuracy in handing on written works. The invention of textual criticism for the West was final.

Such were, in outline, the main results and achievements of the Library. It remains, perhaps, to give a summary of its later history, as

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far as it can be known. The details of the Library are beset, for us, with difficulties and obscurities. There were, it seems, two Libraries: the larger, sometimes called "the Mother," and an "outer" or "daughter" Library within the shrine of the god Serapis. We find in late sources (the only ones we have) the figure of 490,000 rolls in the former, and 42,800 rolls in the latter. How far they contained duplicates we have no idea. Even the efforts of the Ptolemies did not succeed in securing a copy of every work that we know to have existed in Greek, but it was evidently a huge collection, which did also contain Greek translations of at least some writings in other languages.

At some time, or times, the Library went out of existence. There are more stories about its destruction than we need or can control. After about 150 B.C. things declined rapidly, as the Ptolemaic kingdom lost efficiency, power, and stability.

In 47 B.C., Julius Caesar allowed himself to be trapped in Alexandria with Cleopatra in the course of his civil war against the followers of the defeated Pompey and her civil war against her brother. It appears that in the confused fighting the main Library, or part of it, was accidentally destroyed by fire. It is hard to see how great the damage was. Cleopatra is said to have been given by Mark Antony, later on, the contents of the second library of the Greek world, the royal library of Pergamum. That, if true, will have made a difference. Still, it is likely that many books were lost.

In 273 A.D., the Emperor Aurelian made war on and defeated Zenobia, queen of the desert city of Palmyra. On his return westward, he attacked one of her supporters, Firmus by name, who had taken Alexandria. In the fighting, the whole area of the city that contained the royal palaces and the Museum and Library was apparently destroyed; for some time afterward it was a desert. This was probably the occasion of the destruction of the great Library.

In 391 A.D., a Christian mob destroyed a pagan library, incited by the Rasputin-like figure of the bishop Theophilus, "a bold bad man whose hands were alternately polluted with gold and with blood," in the memorable phrase of Gibbon. The reader is referred, for a lurid account of these events, to Charles Kingsley's novel *Hypatia*, a kind of British equivalent of Flaubert's *Salammbô*. This may have been the library in the temple of Serapis.

Good as the story of Theophilus is, it is not as satisfying as that told of the Arab conquest in 641 A.D. The Caliph Omar himself had to rule on the question: should the Library be spared or destroyed? The pious ruler replied that if the books it contained were in harmony with the Holy Koran, then they were superfluous; while if they disagreed with it, then they deserved destruction. The tale contains

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chronological impossibilities and is unlikely to contain any truth, at least in the historical sense, however true it may be to the psychology of triumphant monotheism. It is in fact one of those stories that are too good not to be repeated—especially as it bears on that haunting subject, the ruin of classical literature. That must be my justification for repeating it.

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A Room with Half a View

JOHN F. STEINMAN

THE NUMBER 38 GEARY BUS IN SAN FRANCISCO pulled to a stop at the Transbay Terminal. "End of the line," the driver announced. "Everyone off!" Aroused from a reverie by the driver's voice, I looked around. The bus had been packed when I got on at Divisadero. There was a large exodus at Union Square; Macy's was having a Labor Day Sale. I had grabbed the first vacant seat. Now the bus was empty except for the driver and me. "Oh, okay," I said, then added, "but where's the door?" There was a long pause as I searched the side of the bus, feeling quite perplexed. "Oh, there it is!" I got to my feet and found my way out. The bus driver glanced at me curiously. "How do I get to the BART station?" I asked. I had missed my stop. "Over that way," the driver replied, pointing over his shoulder, "a couple of blocks back to Market Street.

Something had happened. I was in a new and frightening world. Traffic was rushing by crazily as I waited for a lull so I could cross to the sidewalk. I finally made it to safety and began to make my way to the BART Station. In piecing this together later, I had a need to assimilate my experience, to force it into some familiar framework, even some familiar fiction. E. M. Forster's short stories "The Celestial Omnibus" and "The Other Side of the Hedge" came to mind.

The young boy in Forster's "Omnibus" wandered down a blind alley near his home and came across a signpost with the legend "To Heaven" and an arrow pointing toward the blank wall at the end of the alley. He learned that the sign had been placed there a century earlier by the youthful Shelley and his companions as a sort of joke. At the end of the alley the Celestial Omnibus made two trips daily, taking off each morning at dawn and each evening at sunset, surmounting the wall at the end of the alley and traveling across the heavens on a rainbow bridge. The driver was Sir Thomas Browne, who served as a tour guide for his young passenger, introducing him to the epic heroes of the past and to the poets who gave them life.

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My brief trip on the Number 38 Geary crossed no rainbow bridges. The driver, though wearing a uniform of Muni brown, was not the Sir Thomas of Forster's story and gave me guidance limited to the here and now. But I had embarked on an odyssey of exploration that is still in progress.

The next leg of my journey was under the guidance of another Dr. Brown, Robert this time, of a later century. My reverie might be seen as a sort of "brown study." (Reader, be warned, this playfulness with words, these flights of fanciful associations of a hypomanic cast, come unbidden as part of the baggage of my new situation.) At any rate, my attempt to reach the BART Station over the next hour or so might best be described in terms of Brownian movement.

Buffeted by molecular forces beyond my ken, I wandered erratically 90 to 180 degrees off course. Entering a no-man's-land next to the bus terminal, I found myself edging my way along a narrow sidewalk, bumping into posts that appeared out of nowhere on my left, managing to scratch up the left lens of my glasses pretty thoroughly. It was damned frustrating, but I was determined to get to the BART Station. Stubbornly I groped my way forward by clinging hand-over-hand to a chain-link fence that formed one wall of my labyrinth, while I brushed against a wall on the other side. I was alarmed to discover that this wall was formed by the sides of Transbay buses, for the moment, at least, safely parked on a ramp.

Here Forster's "Other Side of the Hedge" came into play: I was in a surreal landscape, people moving about on the other side of the fence, like spectral figures seemingly unaware of my existence. All in all, an atmosphere of alienation out of a Fellini film. This lack of recognition by others seemed to raise some doubts in my mind about my own existence. I remembered Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, "to exist is to be perceived," and having no others or God to observe me, clearly I no longer existed.

Eventually I emerged from the labyrinth to find myself on another narrow sidewalk next to a busy thoroughfare. Traffic rushed by in a bewildering stream, with no letup. Thoroughly frightened, I saw no way of moving from there and sat down on a guardrail. A taxi I hailed sped by without stopping. I hoped that a police car might pick me up, even if it were to arrest me for being in a place obviously off-limits for pedestrians. My Good Samaritan appeared at last—a bearded man with a jaunty tweed hat. At considerable risk, he stopped his car beside me, traffic notwithstanding. "Looks like you're in trouble, my friend," he observed. I readily agreed. "Hop in," he said, as he opened the door. "Quickly!" he added, as the cars behind him slammed on their brakes and honked their horns.

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I told him that I had suddenly developed some problem with my vision and had lost my way trying to find the BART Station to return home. He had me write down my name, phone number, and doctor's name in his memo book. My vision for these tasks, at least, was adequate. He introduced me to his two dogs in back and explained that he was taking them to the veterinarian in Oakland, and that he would be glad to drop me off at the BART Station there and arrange for my return home. I had no idea of where I was. I had hoped to go to the Montgomery Street BART Station in San Francisco but was glad to find help in any direction right now.

I learned much later that I had wandered onto the one-way on-ramp to the Bay Bridge, accepted a ride from a stranger, and given up my attempt to walk, however unknowingly, to Oakland in search of the elusive BART Station. I had no recognition of the fact that my friend was taking me across the Bay Bridge to Oakland and no recognition of the return trip from Oakland to the emergency room at Mount Zion Hospital in San Francisco, when my worried family picked me up and drove me back.

At this point I'd made several discoveries about my capabilities and limits in my new way of being in the world. First, I kept bumping into posts and people on my left, and not my right; there was a loss of my left visual field. Second, I was still able to read and write, as evidenced by my writing my name, address, and physician's name in my friend's memo book. Third, I was experiencing serious difficulty in recognizing such obvious landmarks as the Bay Bridge and in orienting myself as to place; finding my way about the city had become nearly impossible. Fourth, the world outside seemed to be tremendously speeded up; traffic seemed to be moving with bewildering speed, leaving me paralyzed with fear if I contemplated crossing a street; as a passenger in a car, I was fearful that the driver was going double the speed limit.

To backtrack a bit: five days earlier I awoke in the morning feeling my heart beating quite irregularly; the pulse rate at my wrist was 80 with varying pauses between beats, while the thumping in my chest was clocked at 120, also completely irregular. I phoned my physician and told him that I'd suddenly started having atrial fibrillation. He told me to come in, obtained an electrocardiogram, and confirmed my self-diagnosis. He prescribed digitalis, which blocks the rapid and irregular atrial impulses to the ventricles, favoring a slower, stronger, more efficient contraction of the ventricles. It does not necessarily correct the rhythm disturbance in the atria. The plan was for me to return at the end of the week and, if the atrial fibrillation had not corrected itself spontaneously, to go into the hospital for conversion

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of the arrhythmia by electrical means or some specific medication, such as quinidine. As a physician myself, I was aware that the condition was usually benign and treatable, but there were possible complications.

In atrial fibrillation the upper chambers of the heart begin to quiver rapidly and ineffectually, instead of contracting in an orderly fashion and forcing blood into the ventricles and triggering contraction of the ventricles in an orderly sequence. If atrial fibrillation persists for a length of time, the stasis of blood in the atria and their auricular appendages favors the formation of a thrombus, or blood clot. When the atria do start to contract again in a coordinated and effective manner, there is a possibility of a fragment of blood clot breaking loose and being carried to some other point in the body, where it becomes lodged in a small artery, blocking the local circulation. This is known as embolism—the brain is one of the most frequent sites of this occurrence—and it is fraught with the most troublesome consequences.

I had gone to my doctor on a morning in early September for the follow-up visit. We were both pleased that the atrial fibrillation had corrected itself that morning without the need for further intervention. The hospital admission was not necessary. Fortunately, as it turned out, I had taken the bus that morning instead of my car.

Leaving the doctor's office and boarding the crowded bus, I hung on to the handrail as we lurched and jolted down Geary Boulevard. Within a few blocks, I felt a sudden sharp pain in the back of my head, on the right side, as if I'd been hit there by a slingshot. At the same time, I felt giddy and faint. My vision was suddenly strangely altered. Although I could see things straight ahead, my world had closed in on the left. Those things I could see, the inside of the bus, the standing passengers, no longer registered as something familiar. I could "see" but could not recognize people in the bus and the landscape flashing by outside. It seemed as if the objects of my vision had suddenly been stripped of all the memories and associations that had become attached to them over the years and now were more like simple visual sensations, or rather perceptions deprived of their "apperceiving mass," in the old terminology. William James suggested that the newborn infant's perception of the world was one of a "booming, buzzing confusion," and so it now seemed to me.

My immediate reaction was "Damn, this is just what I needed!" I knew, of course, what had happened. A fragment of blood clot *had* broken loose and lodged somewhere in the right posterior cerebral artery, cutting off the blood supply to the right rear portion of my brain, the visual or striate cortex of my right occipital lobe. But the

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seriousness and extent of the damage, and what it might portend for the future, did not become clear till much later. A cockeyed optimist, with a mythic belief in my invulnerability, I thought that perhaps only a tiny vessel and small area of my brain had been involved; that after the initial swelling subsided the loss of function might not be too serious. After all, I'd been through coronary bypass heart surgery five years earlier and continued to climb mountains, enjoyed cross-country skiing, and rode my bicycle twenty miles a day.

So, instead of calling for a cab or ambulance to get me back to the hospital, I was determined to play down the seriousness of the injury. Denial was at work, as well as intellectualization, in an attempt to master my fears. It's been suggested that many of us choose medicine as a profession in order to gain mastery, through intellectual control, over our own fears of death and injury. I'm sure this was an important factor in my case; this essay is a case in point. Of course, growing up in an extended family in which my grandfather and uncle were doctors and had their office in our home must have been a strong contributory factor.

My father, however, was an engineer, a bridge designer. Bridges, both literal and figurative, have always played an important part in my life. It is tempting to speculate that some troll, some genius loci, lured me on to lose myself on the Bay Bridge. My father, on a visit to San Francisco in 1960, suffered a fatal cerebral hemorrhage while crossing a small wooden bridge in Muir Woods.

I sense that another paradigm has been waiting in the wings, but I'd better not get involved in another interminable analysis. A Freudian interpretation might be fascinating, but as Pierre Fermat, the great French mathematician of the seventeenth century, wrote in the margin of his Diophantus with regard to his own famous last theorem: "I have found for this a truly wonderful proof, but the margin is too small to hold it." Mathematicians strived for the last three hundred years to prove or disprove this theorem without success until Andrew Wiles of Princeton recently proved Fermat correct. I'm afraid the same applies to any psychoanalytic interpretation I might offer.

Freud has indeed provided us with a magnificent marriage of humanity and science, of mythos and Logos. But there is a "heads I win, tails you lose!" quality to many of his interpretations that does not meet Karl Popper's criterion of "falsifiability" needed to claim true scientific status. Furthermore, I find it as difficult to believe in the Freudian trinity as in any other. And yet—just as I feel moved, even as a non-believer, when I hear Bach's B minor Mass, or when I view Michelangelo's *Moses, David,* and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel—so do I find a feeling of warmth and of being at home in the

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Freudian synthesis. Still, some people criticize Freud for being irreligious! He was, indeed, a very able scientist, as his early work on aphasia and cerebral palsy attests.

I sense some digression. Although Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is one of my favorite books, providing a strong influence, nevertheless I feel I'd better get back on track here.

Let's see. I was on my way to the emergency room. Once there, I had a need to prove my competence as a physician, providing my case history and self-diagnosis much as above. I'm afraid I was a little patronizing toward the young house doctor who was examining me. Testing my visual fields by moving his fingers from one side of my head to the other, he asked me to tell him when I could see them. At one point, I said: "I can see something moving, but I can't say they are fingers, or which fingers they are." "Aha!" he must have thought, "finger agnosia." I could follow his train of thought as he started me on "Serial Sevens" (subtracting 7's from 100 sequentially), and had me provide him with a sample of my handwriting. "No, I don't have Gerstmann's Syndrome," I said, after completing the subtractions without error. "The lesion is on the right," I continued, "in the calcarine gyrus or the geniculocalcarine tract, with a left hemianopia. It's not in the left angular gyrus." I was being damnably professorial.

I should explain that Gerstmann's Syndrome is a rare and questionable "entity" supposedly associated with a focal lesion in the dominant angular gyrus and characterized by

1. Finger agnosia (loss of recognition of one's fingers).
2. Acalculia (loss of arithmetical ability, supposedly associated with the idea that we learn to count on our fingers.
3. Agraphia, loss of ability to write.
4. Left-right confusion. (This last I've had all my life, but more about that presently.)

Medicine likes to group things in fours. Thus we have the "Tetralogy of Fallot" (a grouping of four congenital heart defects that occur together) and the classical four signs of inflammation: redness, swelling, warmth, and pain, to which a fifth was later added—loss of function. Then there were the four D's of pellagra: "dermatitis, diarrhea, dementia, and death."

Admirable as they may be as a mnemonic aid, they represent, perhaps, a vestige of a paradigm that shackled medicine for a millennium. I'm referring to the dogma of the Four Elements and Four Humors, which stemmed from Empedocles and Pythagorean number lore and was perpetuated by Hippocrates and Galen. Humoral pathology has been partially rehabilitated in our modern medical paradigm through the findings of endocrinology and immunology, al-

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though the number four is inadequate to reflect the multiplicity of factors involved. Four has gained a new prominence in our genetic alphabet, the ACGT and ACGU purine and pyrimidine bases of DNA and RNA, associated with a new central dogma. Our new problem-oriented medical record keeping has not escaped this ancient schema. The acronym SOAP, representing Subjective Symptom, Objective Findings, Assessment or Diagnosis, and Plan for further investigation or treatment, has become standard in our hospitals.

It would have been a feather in the cap of the young house doctor if he could have pinned a diagnosis of Gerstmann's Syndrome on me, with its four fascinating symptoms. I would have felt that way myself. But it wasn't the case. The young doctor had his revenge. He implied that I was incoherent and disoriented. But no, my strength was the strength of numbers.

At this point my own physician arrived. I told him apologetically that I was sorry to disappoint him. He replied that I shouldn't let things like this happen to me anymore. "Enough, already!" He ordered a CAT scan, and while this was going on, my family sat in the observation booth. The doctor explained to them what was going on inside my brain as the X-ray beams sliced through one layer after another. After it was over, the technician asked if I'd like to see my family. She pointed to the window of the observation booth. I saw them, but as through a glass, darkly. It was comforting to find them around, but it was another surreal scene. I asked my doctor where the embolus had lodged. "Right where you said," he replied, "in the right calcarine gyrus."

The most obvious consequence of this damage to my brain was the loss of my left field of vision, technically a left homonymous hemianopia. People usually ask me if that means I can't see out of my left eye. "No," I explain, "the problem is not in the eye but in the brain." The nerves from the eyes to the brain are so arranged (here a diagram is helpful) that the images coming to both eyes from the left are transmitted to the right hemisphere of the brain, and those images from the right field of vision end up in the left hemisphere. I can describe the nature of the loss by holding both hands out straight in front of me, palms down, index finger against index finger. When I fix my gaze on a point between the tips of my index fingers, I can see my entire right hand, but of my left hand I can see only the left index finger and a hazy border of the left middle finger. Beyond that, to the left, the world and I drop away.

I spent the next ten days in the hospital, on medication to prevent further blood clotting, and I started on a rehabilitation program. My first morning, the hospital had thoughtfully supplied me with the San

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Francisco *Chronicle* along with my breakfast tray. Keeping in touch with the world and exercising my visual skills was part of the therapeutic program. I was greatly relieved to find that I could still read, although I did have a little trouble finding my place after I came to the end of a line on the right and needed to turn back to the beginning of the next line on the left. I wondered if Hebrew would be any easier, but of course this simplistic solution would not work. The ancient Greek boustrophedon method of writing, with alternate lines reading from left to right and then right to left, as the ox turns in plowing, might have worked, however otherwise impractical it may be.

On my breakfast tray was a familiar square carton on which I read the word "ILK." I was amused by this sharp cut in my visual field to the left of my point of fixation. The word, of course, was "MILK" and not "SILK" or anything else of that "ILK." It was obvious from the context. When I turned a page of the newspaper, however, to read a memorial tribute to the actress Ruth Gordon, one of my favorites, who had just died, I had a disturbing experience. There was a newspaper photograph of her which I could not associate with the Ruth Gordon I remembered. "Can that be Ruth Gordon?" I wondered. "Or has the newspaper slipped in someone else's picture from their 'morgue' by mistake?" A greater shock of non-recognition occurred when my own family visited. Looking at their faces, I drew a blank, although I was quickly clued in by the sound of their voices. Even my own face in the mirror was not that of someone I could vouch for with certainly.

I had read about this strange *prosopagnosia*, or loss of recognition of faces (from the Greek: *prosopon* means *face, agnosia* means *lack of knowledge*) which seems to be characteristic of right hemisphere lesions. The neurologist Oliver Sacks has written a beautiful case study of this phenomenon, entitled *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, with which I became acquainted soon after my return home from the hospital.

But didn't this run counter to intuition? Didn't this demand some explanation? Here I was able to read, not only in English, but in German Fraktur, Russian Cyrillic (which I'd been studying the past two years), and a little in the Greek and Hebrew in which I was self-taught. Here I was still competent at interpreting the abstract symbols involved in reading, a late-learned and surely secondary survival skill, but I was unable to recognize the faces of my family! Not only faces, but places, landmarks, maps, and drawings or cartoons became problematic for me. A striking example of this schism between my verbal and pictorial world was provided by a letter I received from an old friend whom I hadn't seen in many years. In the letter was enclosed a

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snapshot of my friend, with obviously a grandchild on his left knee. Strangely, his head was turned so that he was facing his right, toward the terra incognita of my left visual field. I wondered why he wasn't looking at the baby on his knee. What was distracting him? It wasn't until I'd finished reading his letter that I learned he was the grandfather of twins, and had another baby on his right knee!

It was strikingly evident that the left and right hemispheres specialized in different tasks. The left hemisphere concentrated on verbal skills: reading, writing, and above all speech—all based on a linear, sequential mode of apprehending the world—all necessary for communicating with one's fellow human beings, for living in a human society. The right hemisphere, on the other hand, dealt with the practical survival skills needed for living in the "real" world, of recognizing one's friends and foes, prey and predators, orienting oneself and finding one's way home from the hunt—in short, the world of Robinson Crusoe before the arrival of Friday.

How can we explain the loss of recognition of faces when there are right hemisphere lesions? My experience with the photograph of my friend with his two grandchildren provides a clue. I did not see the baby on his right knee at first. Experiments have shown that when we cut a picture of a person's face into symmetrical halves, and make a composite of two left halves and two right halves, after the proper turn of one half in each case, that we recognize the person much more readily from the composite of the two right halves. This is just what is lost in a right hemisphere lesion.

One problem I underwent in reading was finding myself trying to read phantom words floating off in space to the left of the margin, vague letter-like marks that I couldn't quite decipher. Perhaps it was something like the phantom-limb sometimes felt by people who have lost a limb. In *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,* Oliver Sacks tells of his patient's attempt to describe a scene in a *National Geographic* illustration—a picture of an unbroken expanse of Sahara dunes. The patient reports: "I see a river and a little guest-house with its terrace on the water. People are dining out on the terrace. I see colored parasols here and there." Dr. Sacks reports that his patient was "looking right off the cover into mid-air, and confabulating nonexistent features, as if the absence of features in the actual picture had driven him to imagine the river and the terrace and the colored parasols."

My mirages were more in the nature of oases of printed words in empty space. The occupational therapist who was working with me in the rehabilitation program taught me a simple trick to avoid this difficulty: just holding one finger along the left margin of the page,

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the admonitory index, to keep my mind from wandering. I owe special thanks to the occupational therapists, who taught me to find my way around the hospital and later to navigate about my own neighborhood and the city streets.

Soon after I came home, just as a man who has taken a fall checks himself for broken bones, I proceeded to take an inventory of my "faculties." Reading, I had already determined, was no difficulty, nor was writing. How about the third "R"? No problem with simple arithmetic, although I did have trouble getting numbers into the correct lines and columns in my checkbook, finding that the all-important left hand digit had fallen into my blind area. Similarly, in reading my digital watch, I might read 2:30 instead of 12:30. Operations with algebraic symbols seemed unaffected by my injury. Not so with geometry: I had problems moving back and forth from one angle or side to another and keeping a clear picture of the spatial relationships in my mind. My father, who got me hooked on mathematics at an early age, jokingly used to propose as a test for sobriety: "What is the derivative of sin X? Cos X? Fine. But if you're really sober, you'll remember that the derivative of cos X is *minus* sin X." I've remembered these relationships for many years but, for the life of me, could not remember whether the sine was the ratio of the opposite or adjacent side over the hypotenuse of a right triangle. Here Descartes, who had done so much to divide the world in two, paradoxically helped me over this hurdle, by his mapping of algebra onto geometry. I've been a numerical mnemonist all my life, memorizing tables of logarithms, trigonometric functions, atomic weights, and historical dates. I'll always remember that sin 30° equals 0.5. By a simple construction of an equilateral triangle, bisecting the 60° angle at the vertex, I could easily verify that the sine function was the ratio of the opposite side over the hypotenuse. I could have spared myself the unnecessary construction by remembering the simpler relationship: sin 0 equals 0, cos 0 equals 1.

Reading music was never easy for me and was now even more difficult. Attaching meaning to the position of the notes on the staff had become slow and laborious, and finding my place on the left end of the staff after finishing a line presented a real problem; my left index finger was not free to serve as a guide here; a further complication was my difficulty in distinguishing the clusters of two from the clusters of three black keys on the left half of the piano keyboard. With some perseverance, however, I was able to regain a few of the simple Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven pieces I had played in the past, and I even learned a couple of Schubert waltzes. This was a real joy.

Similar difficulties cropped up in my appreciation of nature. I'd

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been studying botany and entomology over the past two years, a return to youthful interests long interrupted. If I had difficulty in recognizing human faces, I had even greater difficulty in recognizing the morphological features of plants and insects that were important in taxonomy. Unless, of course, I could assign some numerical constants to them—such as "leaves of three" for poison oak, or the four petals and six stamens of the Cruciferae, the cabbage and wild mustard family.

The world of nature has become more difficult for me to apprehend without some mediation. Much has been said about the value of immediacy and freshness of experience untrammeled by clichés. But I wonder if such virginal experiencing of the world is possible unless one has spent one's early years isolated from human contact, like the Wild Boy of Aveyron. Even Miranda, shipwrecked on a lonely island in *The Tempest*, who says:

> I do not know
> One of my sex; no woman's face remember,
> Save from my glass, mine own; nor have I seen
> More that I may call men than thou, good friend,
> And my dear father:

yet has known a small society, and is able to say at the end: "O brave new world, that has such people in't!"

The experience of the individual is not based simply on his naked sensations. Our evolution, and the evolution of our culture is carried on not only in the four-letter alphabet of DNA, but in the extra-genetic transmission of culture through language, through human communication. The richness and quality of our experience is closely tied to the richness and quality of vision of our culture bearers, the poets. They are more than just the recorders of our experience. They are the shapers of our world.

Shakespeare compares the Lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and has Theseus exclaim:

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

Shakespeare has long been acclaimed for his penetrating psychological insights. Is it possible that he was also a keen clinical observer

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of neurological disorders? His description of the poet suggests that his poet suffered from a left homonymous hemianopia much like mine, although the vertical "heaven to earth" eye rolling speaks more for a quadrantic field defect.

Each of us has a preferred mode of encountering the world. Mine has always been the written word. I mentioned earlier that I had always suffered from some right-left confusion, although I considered myself right-handed. My father would ask me: "Can't you *feel* that your right hand is stronger, more capable?" No, I couldn't. Instead I developed a rather cumbersome technique for distinguishing left and right. I knew that we read from left to right. I would visualize a printed page in front of me, remember on which edge of the page I started to read, and that would be "left." Needless to say, this slowed me down in close-order drill in the army and in following someone's directions on which way to turn in traffic.

Even as a teenager I carried about with me, in my mind, a ready-reference poetry of place. Thus, hiking in the Green Mountains of Vermont, I came across a vista that evoked: "All I could see from where I stood / Were three long mountains and a wood. / I turned and looked the other way, / And saw three islands in a bay." This must be the very place, I thought, that inspired Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Renascence." Not until I captured similar vistas in other places did I realize that the essential truths of poetry were not locally confined.

It was not surprising, then, when I first visited Greece a few years ago and had my first view of the Aegean from Cape Sounion just south of Athens, that my vision was colored by blind Homer's "wine dark sea." And of the Temple of Poseidon on that rocky promontory overlooking the Aegean, I remember more of the graffito the guide pointed out, where Byron had scratched his name sometime in the 1820s, than of the temple itself. Again, I wondered whether this had been the spot that inspired Byron's "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll! / Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain; . . ."

Strange that my earlier preferred mode should be strengthened. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 always disturbed me: "Unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." It offended my sense of distributive justice. Now I see it not as a prescriptive injunction, but rather a descriptive statement of things as they are. Order begets order, as life feeds on negative entropy, according to Delbrück and Schrödinger.

If there is a distributive justice, I seem to have gained in the world of words what I've lost in the immediacy of perception in the world of nature. I cannot look at a patch of lawn without thinking of

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Whitman's wonderful tropes in his reply to a child's query: "What is grass?"

On the lighter side, I find myself liberated in the playful use of words. I now breeze through the ridiculous crossword puzzles in the *Nation*, which formerly turned me off by their far-fetched clues, clues based on the most outrageous puns, anagrams, and charades.

On the other hand, my chess game has suffered. Any player preparing to attack me from the left side of the board has a definite advantage. It is difficult for me to visualize the whole board at once, and I tend to neglect my left flank.

My world has contracted in other ways. It was not just the loss of half my visual field. I was resigned to the fact that I would not drive a car again; in fact, I was even relieved at being freed of that responsibility. I still avoid riding my bicycle in traffic, though I hope eventually to get back to it. My recognition of faces and my ability to find my way around town has greatly improved.

My greatest difficulty is in finding papers, books, and objects that I've placed on my cluttered desktop or bookshelves only a moment before. Kurt Goldstein, the holistic neurologist, described what he called the "catastrophic reaction," in which the brain-injured individual, when stressed by having to perform a task at the limits of his ability, becomes completely disorganized, frantic, and unable to perform the simple tasks he ordinarily performed with ease. I've gained a firsthand knowledge of such catastrophic reactions. Like children with attention deficit disorders, I need to simplify my environment. There is also an infant's struggle to establish object constancy; if a pen I have just put down happens to be covered by a sheet of paper, it no longer exists: out of sight is out of mind. I am not sure that this has anything to do with the cerebral embolism; it might well be part of the normal aging process.

When I look toward my left, there is no darkness, no line of demarcation. That part of my world and of myself have simply vanished. Lewis Carroll captures this feeling in *The Hunting of the Snark*:

> And the Baker replied "Let me say it once more.
> It is this, it is this that I dread!
> I engage with the Snark every night after dark—
> In a dreamy, delirious fight:
> I serve it with greens in those shadowy scenes,
> And I use it for striking a light:
> But if ever I meet with a Boojum, that day,
> In a moment (of this I am sure),
> I shall softly and suddenly vanish away—
> And the notion I cannot endure!"

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Why does Lewis Carroll choose the initial letter *B* for his characters: Bellman, Banker, Beaver, Butcher, Baker, Billiard Marker, Maker of Bonnets and Hoods? Alliteration, of course, but Martin Gardner, in his *Annotated Snark*, suggests that the choice of the letter might have something to do with the basic theme of existence, "to be," and the poem doubles as a delightful nonsense verse to amuse one of Carroll's young friends, yet carries the heavier burden of an expression of existential angst.

In a letter to Mr. Higginson, Emily Dickinson writes: "I had a terror since September, I could tell to none: and so I sing, as the boy does by the burying ground, because I am afraid."

I cannot deny that my experience last September brought with it intimations of mortality. My writing now helps allay the dread of which Lewis Carroll and Emily Dickinson speak.

Afterword

Nearly ten years have passed since the events reported here. The original report was submitted as a term paper for a course in the Nexa Department at San Francisco State University, a department dedicated to bridging the sciences and humanities. The course was entitled Left Brain, Right Brain. The report was written in April 1986, some eight months after the bout of atrial fibrillation and cerebral embolism described here.

Since the initial episode, there has been no change in the degree of visual field loss, although there is evidence of what is called "blind sight," the vague, shadowy appearance of my left hand when I drop both hands to my sides and slightly forward. Also, when I close my eyes or turn out the light in a dark room, there is a brighter afterimage in my left or blind field of vision.

Recognition of faces has improved, but the images on the television or film screen continue to elude me; I have trouble remembering who is the hero and who the villain. Our dogs seem to ignore the sights and sounds of the dogs on the TV screen but pick up scents and sounds from outside the house that are imperceptible to me. A wise selectivity on their part.

Humorous, if embarrassing, incidents continue to plague me. On a couple of occasions, returning to the car where my wife has dropped me off, I have attempted to get into the passenger side of the wrong red car, where the woman at the wheel is not my wife. More fatal than mistaking my wife for a hat? Earlier, I would bump into pedestrians on my left, saying "Excuse me," and turn around to dis-

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cover that it was not a person but a fire hydrant I was apologizing to.

The moral to this tale? That we should be grateful that Nature has endowed us with backup systems and should accept the fact that we have individual differences in our coping mechanisms demanding different approaches to the world. We must understand that the alternative systems are not always translatable into the grammar and syntax with which we are familiar, just as the deaf have developed American Sign Language into a much more effective means of communication for them than finger spelling and English grammar.

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Poems

BARBARA RAS

Taza Shambal

Shreds of dreams left
like nesting in my mouth, syllables
out of the blue, Taza Shambal, a new emirate,
an undiscovered Himalayan peak, and then the mockingbird
in the live oak over the bedroom window
begins rewinding for another riff.
To watch you sleep, I think, trust
is a boat. And us, twelve years married,
keeping company with eggs and roses, donuts and corn,
inches and nights. Another morning I'd say dirty dozen,
but today, our anniversary, I want to applaud
you awake, applaud because you close your eyes
when you drink milk, because you say Júly,
because as a child you cared that they didn't
    paint under the dashboard,
and now ask me not to pick at my body,
because you stopped on your way to work to pet a cat,
kneeling in a stranger's yard as if nothing could hurt you,
because your hands on my back when you press me to you
feel like friendly starfish,
because at our wedding you wore an earring shaped like a baby
as a tie tack and it waved to me during the Messiaen piece,
because you called me in New York and asked how my clothes
were holding up.
Because I'm the march and you're the band,
Because shoulder to shoulder in pitiless defeat and crying shame,
Because when I read your face it's full of
    understanding, happy pets,
rain on me with redemption, and here the last of
    the last birds is chirping,
plump and fed, happy anniversary, happy anniversary,
and the world wakes to the song of porters singing,
Taza Shambal, Taza Shambal.

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Anna to Anna

Gone before the birth, dead
before her great-grandchild could arrive,
my grandmother comes back,
for the sake of her namesake, she returns,
she who made the egg in my mother to make me
with my own tiny eggs to make Anna, the baby,
already set for life with her own eggs, the last, for now,
in a holy egg-ly succession.
And now, Anna to Anna, they meet here,
different stumps of the same memory
arcing forward and back
celebrating the same name.
And the elder, leaning over the crib, whispers
"Taka malutka, taka ladny,"
in the Polish of her childhood,
so small, so pretty, to the little Anna, who knows
through the ladderwork of blood, this elder
who crossed Europe and an ocean at eighteen
carrying her first child, holding it in
until Ellis Island, where she let go, screaming, but unafraid,
because everyone wore shoes.
And the baby reaches in her infant but certain way to ask,
"Bless me, babcia,
bless me with your name and your great spirit,
bless me with your courage to cross worlds, orphaned,
to build, to build with blood, if nothing else,
a life."
The elder smiles, buoyant now
less the layers sloughed on her many journeys,
and in a common language, gums to gums, she says,
"Anna, I bless you, name for name, my sweet,
great child, I bless you into a world where you may walk
as you wish, yes, even happily
without shoes."

✪ BARBARA RAS's poems have appeared in the *Massachusetts Review, ZYZZYVA,* and the *Denver Quarterly.* She is the editor of *Costa Rica: A Traveler's Literary Companion,* a collection of Costa Rican fiction in translation.

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Resisting Geometry

ANN HOSTETLER

The first time I saw my father defeated,
he was leaving the only parent-teacher conference
he ever had concerning my academic failure,
his black raincoat drooping over one arm.
Settling his other arm over my shoulder,
he walked me to the car, told me about
his sixth-grade failure to master fractions.

How could I explain to him
that it was the axioms themselves
I objected to, knowing that, like his whims,
I had to take them on faith.
Tested against experience
they appeared to be correct—
no two points could occupy the same space
at the same time; lines perfectly parallel
will never intersect; a straight line
is the shortest distance between two points.
But such self-evidence troubled me.

Imagining exceptions, I felt called
to test the axioms, to wage a battle
against givens, resisting at the root.
When the boys circled Mr. Oelkers
at the blackboard, arguing logic,
I sat at the back of the room
drawing shapes that defied these laws.

It was only in the spring, sprawled out
in front of the stereo, listening to James Taylor

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and embroidering the margins of my geometry book
with blue ballpoint pen, that I realized
what was at stake for me was the axiomatic quality
of reasoning itself, the ways in which our assumptions
construct reality, become paradigms
that organize our vision.

I realized that no one else took geometry
as seriously as I did—at least no one
who was failing, that is—and that
in order to get on with life
I would have to get beyond axioms,
memorize theorems, prove hypotheses.

This was not art, where my doodles
might have some eccentric meaning.
This was a game with rules
and if I put aside my distrust of logic
long enough, I could learn to play.
But there was no longer time
to be good at it, only time to garner
a hard-won D.

When the final report came home
I tried to explain my triumph to my father—
my passing as an act of will—
that at the last minute
I had mastered something more
than grades reflected. As I began
to speak a shadow settled over his face.
Even at fourteen I saw that he was weighing
how much he could take on faith.

✪ ANN HOSTETLER teaches English and creative writing at the University School of Milwaukee. Her poems have appeared in *Makato Poetry Review*, *Mothering*, and other journals.

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On Contemplating the Commissioned Portrait of a British Viceroy of India, Carrying the Caption, "Served with Distinction, 1910–1932"

HUSTON SMITH

Who could have dreamed, gazing on this willful face,
that India touched him more than he touched her.

Trains multiplied, of course. Huge
baby-booms of belching smoke and whistle's wail.

English, too, improved, as Eatons
—short pants, broad white collars, the works—
sprouted in unlikely places.

Even the manly sports took hold,
as yogas bowed to bat and ball.
Horses wheeled to mallet's stroke
while women watched in printed frocks.

But I have heard:

His wife declared he mellowed through the years.
Listened more, insisted less.
Was more patient when a servant slipped.

And when the time to leave rolled round,
he knelt and kissed the parched red ground.
A tear met the dust in that waterless land,
that had known so well his heavy hand.

✪ HUSTON SMITH, retired from Syracuse University, is Visiting Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of *One Nation Under God: The Triumph of the Native American Church.*

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LETTER FROM FRANCE

The Art of the Impossible

EUGEN WEBER

We landed at Charles de Gaulle airport on May 2, just in time for that evening's debate between the two candidates for the presidency of the Fifth French Republic: Lionel Jospin, the Socialist, and Jacques Chirac, the Gaullist. Eight days earlier, the first ballot of the election had seen Jospin come in at the top of the polls, with 23.3 percent of the votes cast, ahead of Chirac with 20.8 percent. But Chirac's right-wing competitor, Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, a favorite until the last weeks of the campaign, had garnered almost as many votes as the mayor of Paris, while 37 percent of the electorate divided itself among fringe candidates: ecologists who sounded like egologists, Communists, radical left and radical right. Could Jospin capitalize on his unexpectedly strong showing? Could Chirac, given up as lost, unite the disunited national majority of right-wing voters? The debate would play a major part in deciding who won the presidency.

Weary after a night in the air, we forced ourselves to stay awake; and it proved worth the effort. On our fifteen-year-old black and white television screen (for which we pay a tax of $75 a year), we expected an American-style joust of simplistic sound bites. We got two articulate adversaries, debating seriously about serious matters. No demagogy, no polemics, no trivialization of issues, but a quiet, forceful opposition of substantive arguments based on fact, with the rivals treating each other and the public as adults. After 137 minutes of this contest, which neither candidate won on points, we were glad to go to sleep, impressed.

Just as impressive was the frustration the media expressed on the morrow. Most newspaper, radio, and television comments voiced appreciation of the men's respect for the French and for each other, but also, and sometimes more so, disappointment that they had not pulled each other's hair. Steamier altercations, sharper clashes, ideally a verbal knockout would have made better news. The French public is more mature than the American public; the French media ain't necessarily so.

On Sunday, May 7, Chirac was finally elected president of the Republic. Third time lucky! He had tried and been defeated in 1981 and 1988; this time he harvested 52.6 percent of the vote against Jospin's 47.4 percent. But almost one-fifth of the electorate abstained—a high proportion for the French; and more than one in twenty of those who cast ballots did not vote for either presidential candidate: a record! So the winner won with only 49.5 percent of the votes cast: a lower score than any other president before him. Yet Chirac won fair and square, attracting an impressive 40 percent of the blue-collar vote and a majority of those under thirty-five—both groups more often found in the left-wing camp. If Chirac stood for the right, it was far from a conservative, let alone a reactionary, right. And if Jospin served the left well, his was a remodeled left, strongest among middle- and lower-middle-income groups than among classic proletarians, strongest of all in the public sector that represents one French family in five.

Jospin's electoral defeat had been a political success. After fourteen years of an allegedly Socialist presidency that left the Socialist Party fractured, after a decade of economic growth and socioeconomic doldrums, the country seemed ready to shake off the old regime. Exit polls found that two in five of those voting for

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Chirac declared that they had done it above all to avoid another seven years of socialist rule. Yet, between the first and second ballot, the left had gained 10 percent of the vote. Of those who changed minds or votes between the ballots—a third of Le Pen's nationalists, three *écolos* in five, two-thirds of leftists, and 86 percent of Communists favored the onetime secretary of the Socialist Party and minister of education, who stood for the presidency only because more prestigious leaders decided not to run. Chirac, meanwhile, had lost a portion (not quite 6 percent) of the right-wing pool.

Other figures were similarly unusual. Three working people in four had voted for Mitterrand in 1988; a bare majority voted for Jospin in 1995. Two young people in three had voted for Mitterrand in 1988; less than half of them preferred Jospin seven years later. Catholic and conservative supporters of European Union appreciated Jospin's European credentials above their attachment to the right. The familiar benchmarks were still there, but their memory was stronger than their hold in practice.

Still and all, Chirac's supporters had reason to celebrate. They held 80 percent of the seats in parliament and controlled four-fifths of France's ninety-six departments. At the Théâtre Marigny, two steps from the presidential palace, where Sacha Guitry's *Let's Dream* (*Faisons un Rêve*) was playing, a poster announced the last performance for May 21—the anniversary of François Mitterrand's inauguration in May 1981. Three days before that, on May 18, Mitterrand handed over the keys to the Elysée and urged his successor to care well for the ducks in the presidential pond.

Fourteen years earlier, the first socialist president of any French republic, newly elected, had celebrated his inauguration at the Panthéon, evoking great friends of the people, such as the tribune Jean Jaurès, who are enshrined there. On Thursday, May 18, Chirac began his day by visiting General de Gaulle's tomb at Colombey, in rainy Champagne, and ended it by riding up the Champs-Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe, while the wind whipped and tore at the great tricolor flag beneath the arch. Symbolic references disposed of, it was time to get to work.

The legacy Chirac took over was a mixed one. "When the first job of the young is unemployment," Mitterrand declared in 1981, "I say that is not fair." With socialists at the helm, the new president decreed, "The battle of employment has begun." It is not over yet. Mitterrand's recipe for curing joblessness was classic: industrial growth, more jobs and many more in the public sector, more buying power, rising consumption, redistribution of profits, social justice. In 1981 the minimum wage, family allowances, and old-age pensions were raised significantly, and a so-called solidarity contract permitted pre-retirement on 70 percent of wages. In 1982 the retirement age was lowered to sixty (fair for a lot of workers, a waste of many more!); a fifth week of paid vacation was legislated; and the weekly work time that was lowered from forty hours to thirty-nine was paid at the old forty-hour rate.

Earlier retirement and shorter working hours were supposed to liberate jobs and, like redistributive payments, increase buying power, sending more money coursing through the economy's veins. Results were not long in coming. By the end of 1981, capital began to flee the country, the trade deficit grew worse, and inflation nudged 14 percent. The franc had to be devalued in October 1981, then again in June 1982 and March 1983. Also in March 1983 unemployment passed the three million mark. The battle for employment, in short, had been waged and lost. Negative opinions of the president, 16 percent in 1981, had climbed to 57 percent by 1984.

By then, expansive Keynesianism had given way to classic economic rigor, and left-wing discourse began to facilitate a right-wing policy. Mitterrand, the worse for wear, was claiming to "have established a mixed economy where private and public sector live together"—to the detriment of the latter. For a decade thereafter, socialists, in power or out of it, would do the dirty work that the right seldom dares to undertake. The market economy, supposed to operate according to a "democratic plan" responsive to "the people of the left," was liberalized. The franc would be kept strong at almost any price. Wages that were disconnected from prices remained steady, while prices rose and household consumption shrank. Coal mines, shipyards, arsenals, and ironworks closed down. Great industrial conglomerates—Péchiney, Saint-Gobain, Rhône-Poulenc—laid off workers by the tens of thousands.

Speculation on the stock market and in real

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estate took off. Inflation, which stood at 13.4 percent in 1982, receded to 1.6 percent in 1993; the foreign trade balance, billions in the red in 1982, was solidly in the black by 1993; foreign investment in France grew fivefold, French investment abroad nearly doubled, the *franc fort* was secure, its exchange rate stronger, as American tourists can testify. But the homeless and the jobless were everywhere; beggars haunted streets and the *métro*; social security, not designed for mass unemployment, cracked under the strain, and the national debt tripled in real terms. In September 1993, when President Mitterrand attended the first showing of Claude Berri's new film, *Germinal*, commentators suggested that, 108 years after the novel's publication, some things were not much better than in Zola's day.

Not all was dark—far from it. One part of Mitterrand's plan had proved a real success: modernization of business, industry, the economy, the backbone of Mitterrand's policies, had gone ahead with a will. French industry took the lead in electronics and engineering. French firms competed successfully in the global market. Faster than Japanese bullet trains, the TGV (*train à grande vitesse*) began to run in 1981; the Minitel, a telephone-computer, was introduced in 1983; the chunnel under the English Channel opened ten years later.

Aware that history forgets while concrete and glass endure, Mitterrand covered his capital with projects that put men to work while promising a smidgen of immortality by association. A new "people's opera" was built in a popular quarter, only to prove inaccessible to modest patrons by its prices and, more recently, to any public at all by its strikes. A grand enlarged and refurbished Louvre attracted visitors, while the new pyramid in its courtyard obstructed their flow. A strikingly designed new national library, soon dubbed the TGB (*très grande bibliothèque*), felt as unwelcoming to books as to their users and threatened to cost more in annual upkeep than its budget could bear. Mitterrand believes that economics are subordinate to politics, and he is probably right. Public works, seven billion francs' worth, and architectural displays would keep his name alive when he and his critics were long gone.

Other achievements were as equivocal. Against the objections of a majority of the French, the death penalty was abolished. The centralized Jacobin and Napoleonic state was set on the road to decentralization, encouraging more democracy at the local level, and more corruption, too. The Communist Party, a partner in government from 1981 to 1984, was banished to the political fringe and demoted from a force to an anachronism. Its share of the vote, 15.4 percent in the elections of 1981, had by 1988 fallen to 6.7 percent. Communist presence and Communist pressure had long divided the electorate of the left and complicated the life of its governments. The rise of a radical right would similarly affect the moderate opponents of the left.

Founded in 1972 by nationalists, reactionaries, neo-Fascists, nostalgic Vichyites, and frustrated partisans of keeping Algeria French (*tous les cocus de l'histoire*, as a friend described them), the National Front represented a marginal right that never attained even one percent of the electoral vote (seventy-four candidates in 1981, 0.11 percent of votes cast). By 1984 its lists, headed by the violent, eloquent Jean-Marie Le Pen, attracted more than two million electors, less nostalgic about the past than irate about the present. Their protest votes, more socially than politically motivated, reflected the discomforts of economic crisis in an urban, modernizing society. But Le Pen would not have gone far without help from Mitterrand.

To protect the left from a crushing defeat in the general elections of 1986, the traditional election method by majority vote was replaced by proportional representation that favored splinter parties—not least the National Front (NF). The Communist bogey had long ensured conservative durability. It was reasonable to hope that a Le Penist surge would aid socialist survival. Having reduced Communist capacity to split the left-wing vote, Mitterrand encouraged the nationalists to divide the mainstream right and, at the same time, to discredit it by association with right-wing extremism. In March 1986, with more than two and a half million votes and nearly 10 percent of suffrages, proportional representation returned 35 Le Penists to the National Assembly and 137 NF representatives to regional councils throughout the land.

Nationalists in the early 1980s had counted a few thousand; several years later the Front claimed 65,000 members. By the presidential elections of 1988, Le Pen, appealing to "the

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rising tide of joblessness, criminality and terrorism," chalked up the best score ever attained by the extreme right: 14.4 percent of the popular vote, more than double that of the Communist candidate. Thereafter, even when a moderate government (headed by Chirac) got rid of proportional representation, the NF—populist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic—remained the favorite refuge of the protest vote. That brought Le Pen 15 percent of votes cast in the first ballot of April 1995, not far behind Chirac's 20 percent. It was the reward, as Le Pen insisted, for saying out loud what others thought on the quiet. Right or wrong, thanks to Mitterrand's maneuvers and to the economic crisis his policies accelerated, Le Pen and the NF became and now remain a part of the French political landscape.

This is not the sort of thing that Mitterrand would either admit or regret. All blows and all maneuvers are permitted in the book of a man for whom amoralism seems the essence of politics and scandalous behavior counts against political opponents only. Fêted by his friends on leaving the Elysée, Mitterrand explained, "I never contradicted myself, I simply said something else"—reminiscent of Bernard Tapie's memorable assertion: "I lied in good faith." Twice minister of urban affairs, several times bankrupt, convicted of bribery and fraud, Tapie was one of Mitterrand's protégés, as were a slew of major left-wing figures tarred with the brush of corruption. Which highlights another passage of Mitterrand's remarks on the same occasion: "[The Socialist Party] is made up of honest people who have made integrity a personal rule. . . . No one doubts today that socialism and moral rigor are one."

Quite a statement, this, in the midst of the richest crop of scandals that the country has known in our century. Of course, the talented, cynical man dying of prostate cancer after having run the gamut of ideologies knew better, and so did those who heard him. In France as elsewhere, principles are the shield of practice, talk of integrity often conceals corruption. But then, as Mitterrand's onetime attaché, Jacques Attali, remarked, the most important quality in a politician is indifference.

Indifference is not a quality prized by Jacques Chirac. In the 1960s, when he served Georges Pompidou, he was known as *le bulldozer.* In 1981, his slogan in the presidential elections he lost to Mitterrand was "Chirac Now," a straight reproduction of "Reagan Now." The very successful mayor of Paris, triumphantly re-elected to that job three times, shares neither the amoralism of "the Florentine" Mitterrand nor his slipperiness. He declares that he hates Le Pen, who "represents all that I detest." On the other hand, his slogan in 1995, like that of Jospin, his rival, recalled those that brought Mitterrand to power, and for good reason: the problems of 1981 had evolved but had not fundamentally changed; the yearning for solutions had only grown more fierce.

In 1981, Mitterrand appealed to those wearied by twenty-three years of Gaullist or rightist rule. His slogan, *changer la vie,* promised a better life in a more just society. Fourteen years and 1.5 million more jobless later, the tone was less lyrical, but the slogans remained the same, one candidate claiming that he stood for change, the other for "real change." Now, dreams of better days clamored for realization.

France is the world's fourth largest economy, but in nine of the past twelve years, the economy has grown more slowly than that of its West European partners; and unemployment, half again as high as in Germany and Britain, has grown faster. While official unemployment figures stuck stubbornly above 12 percent, more than five million of fifty-seven million French lived at or near the poverty line; and a quarter of those under twenty-five were out of work. The social security deficit currently turns around 110 billion francs. Unemployment was kept high by a rigid labor market, burdensome payroll taxes, the cost of hiring and firing workers, and a bureaucratic paper maze that was discouraging to employers.

Chirac had promised to raise wages (especially in the public sector), increase spending, increase aid to farmers, provide more teachers for overloaded schools, cut the budget deficit (now at some 6 percent of Gross Domestic Product), and do it all without raising taxes. In his chamber debut, Chirac's newly appointed prime minister, Alain Juppé, laid out how this was to be done: state-subsidized jobs for the unemployed, a rise in the minimum wage, higher old-age pensions, homes for the homeless, higher welfare payments in overseas

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territories, new family-allowance payments for all mothers after the first child, lower payroll taxes, tax incentives for businesses operating in poor urban areas, interest-free loans for first-time home buyers, more money for the arts, for AIDS, and for the war on drugs.

To pay for these admirable projects, Juppé set aside the campaign pledge not to raise taxes, which are already highest of any among G7 countries. In June, a supplementary budget bill increased the tax share of GDP from 44 percent to 44.4 percent. There would be more corporate taxes, a reinstituted wealth tax, and an increase from 18.6 percent to 20.6 percent in the Value Added (sales) Tax (VAT)—already the highest in Europe.

The socialists, too, had tried to deal with unemployment by creating more jobs and to stimulate consumption by pumping up the purchasing power of modest households. Bureaucratic guerrilla and unyielding levies had instead dampened consumption and hindered hiring. Juppé's recipe sounded little different from that of his predecessors. He promised to create 700,000 new jobs by the end of 1996 by cutting the cost of hiring. This may simply shift employment from regular workers, encouraged to take early retirement, to subsidized ones who can be let go when their subsidies run out and be replaced by more subsidized temporaries.

A more flexible labor market would certainly provide less incentive to replace workers by machines. But, so far, the government's actions hardly match its professed intentions. Investment continues to substitute capital for workers, and industrial concentration continues to gut communities. In 1995, at Saint-Gobain (Aisne), some ninety miles northeast of Paris, the local glassmaking company closed a factory, which dated back to Colbert and 1665, by shifting remaining personnel to a more modern plant nearby. Saint-Gobain is only one of many employers rationalizing their operations and cutting down their workforce sharply as they do.

As new job seekers come into the market, the labor force keeps expanding faster than even a thriving economy can absorb. For every two new jobs created over the past twelve months, only one person left the unemployment rolls. Juppé's war on joblessness may turn out to be a phony war, the prelude to one more defeat. In the first quarter of 1995, household purchases of manufactured goods fell 0.3 percent, revenues from the VAT by 0.1 percent. They should fall faster now that the VAT is up. Customers repine, consumption lags, store clerks chat idly waiting for Japanese tourists to make up the shortfall of French shoppers. Can France spend its way out of joblessness? Not with restrictive labor laws, high payroll taxes, a higher VAT, and good intentions.

Such problems are not limited to France. Hans Magnus Enzensberger has pointed out that all over the world "more and more people are being permanently excluded from the economic system because it no longer pays to exploit them." It certainly pays better to do without them if one can, and the French case illustrates this plight.

Global wage competition endangers welfare and wages, and it makes employment more precarious. Nor does this affect the unskilled alone. In 1988, 5 percent of university graduates were unemployed two and a half years after obtaining a degree; in 1992, 11.5 percent were jobless. Thirty percent of young people with an engineering degree had found no job nine months after graduation. A large proportion of those employed, whatever their qualifications, held only temporary appointments. It used to be that employment was open-ended: you got a job for good. Now, more and more jobs are for one year or two, renewable of course, but precarious, and this dampens long-term commitment on either side. After four internships (*stages*) over twelve months, the highly qualified Coralie, twenty-three, now has a job, but a temporary one: what is known as a CDD (*contrat à durée déterminée*). "I really can't feel involved," she says. "When I see plans that run for a year or more, I know that one year from now I shall not be here."

Meanwhile, with the retirement age at sixty, pre-retirement plans encourage wage earners above fifty-five to work half-time and draw 80 percent of their pay until they reach sixty. Not that all want to do so. In 1991, 28 percent of part-time workers wished that they could work more than they did; in 1994, 37 percent wished that they could. And, while work gets more scarce and labor supply exceeds demand, the government continues to pay the family allowances, which were introduced half a century ago to reverse what was then a

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demographic shortfall, and even to enlarge their scope. Not a good situation for taxpayers or for the welfare state, still less for those employed full-time, part-time, or not at all. For centuries, work has been the crux of social, hence personal, identity. Its passing for so many destabilizes society and impoverishes personal life.

The chronic, structural decline of traditional employment is one of the critical problems that face the Western world. But France has particular problems of its own. One is a bloated public sector in which the state employs one French worker in five and whose entitlements bear hard on the budget. Efforts to reduce subsidies to such overstaffed public companies as Air France have not gotten very far. At the end of March 1995, France was nearly brought to a standstill by air, rail, and urban transport strikes called to forestall expected post-election cuts. All leading candidates expressed sympathy for the strikers. Chirac found industrial action perfectly reasonable, Balladur thought it normal "that they should want to improve their lot." Not their service. No working politician really wants to take on unions that can tie daily life in knots. And while nationalized industries are being sold off again, few private entrepreneurs would care to tackle the huge, costly, and combative transport and communications conglomerates.

Then there is rent control, which came with the First World War and never quite went away, because it harvests more votes from renters than from its opponents. Owners of rental property in France sold off what they could as condos and co-ops, provided minimal upkeep for what was left, built little or nothing new, except at the luxury level. When, after World War II, France found herself with insufficient housing, most of it ramshackle and shabby, governments of the right and left reacted by placing more punitive restrictions on the owners and, more positively, by subsidizing public housing for people of modest means.

So, having first discouraged rentals, municipalities and the state went into the rental business, using taxpayers' money to replace the investments they had driven away. Public housing along with the financing, contracts, speculation, and allocations that went with it generated many scandals, discredited many politicians, and enriched others. The second stage of a relentless process opened a decade or so ago, when municipalities eager for revenue encouraged speculators eager for quick profits to convert dwelling space into offices.

Commercial renters cause fewer headaches than private lodgers, and they pay higher real estate taxes. The result: more than two million square meters of unrented office space in Paris alone, but also fewer people living and shopping where many had dwelt before.

When we moved into our Paris apartment fifteen years ago, there were two bakers, one butcher, one fishmonger, one cheese merchant, and two stationers within easy walking distance. All of these have been replaced by shops selling lingerie, haberdashery, sandwiches, or expensive goods addressed not to regulars but to transients. What remains are a shrinking pool of residential rentals, higher rents for those who are left, fewer facilities for surviving residents, fewer choices for renters of modest means. In March 1995 the regional council of the Ile de France region offered 10,000 francs (about $2,000) to every property owner willing to rent or re-rent a vacant lodging. Slim pickings for high risks. Like potential employers, property owners continue to be reluctant to take a chance that is beset with peril.

So Chirac's choices are limited. Even presidencies are not so much what one might wish as what one gets. General de Gaulle resigned in 1969, after losing a referendum, because he believed that his legitimacy as a leader rested on popular support of his policies. Chirac's own Gaullian view of politics may not extend to political suicide; but he regards durability as dependent on legitimacy, which rests in turn on the success of policies. As long as French problems remain much the same, policies will too. The main problem of the day, unemployment, is aggravated by xenophobic currents that link illegal immigration to delinquency and legal immigration to economic adversity. A structural crisis of the economy is exacerbated by the discredit of political classes tarnished by well-publicized moral lapses, but also by the wear and tear of local administration.

In mid-June, one month after the presidential vote, the French went to the polls again to elect 512,851 municipal councillors in 36,771 villages and townships. Two in five incumbent

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mayors refused to run again, because so many found themselves in trouble with the law, because the administrative burden grows heavier with decentralization, but also because, as the president of the Association of French Mayors insisted, they dreaded "the risks of a social explosion." Tensions are too high, *Le Monde* quoted him as saying; "two societies coexist on the same territory," and each makes the other uneasy.

That was also the message of the National Front. "N as in Nazi, F as in Fascist," its opponents charged; but violent activism did not discourage the resentful or the frightened. Closet racists, closet xenophobes muttered to each other when the coast was clear. In cafés and bars, drinkers *sur le zinc* do not bother to lower their voices. In a Picardy village near Amiens, nineteen-year-old Fabien, who had supported Le Pen for president before switching to Jospin, told a journalist: "I agree with Hitler who managed to put everyone to work, but I blame him for really going nuts over the Jews. I would be frightened with Le Pen, but voting for him makes me feel better, I don't know why." Then he added: "When I'm twenty-five, I'll run for election in my village. . . . I don't know under what label. Perhaps Tapie." In a courtroom not far from Fabien, Tapie had just been condemned to two years of prison for corruption and the suborning of witnesses. But nineteen-year-olds pay little attention to that sort of thing and so, apparently, do their elders.

As an ex-Socialist Alsatian from Offwiller, a sunny village where two in five voted for Le Pen, insisted: "The National Front is not Nazism, we wouldn't accept that. Le Pen wants to kick foreigners out, that's all." Alsace, where unemployment is low and prosperity high, gave more than a quarter of its votes overall to Le Pen; and his followers did well in the municipal elections, too. Not as well, though, as in Provence where unemployment is high (20 percent in the department of Bouches-du-Rhône) and so is friction between *pieds noirs* French evicted from Algeria and Arab residents. In 1989, NF candidates had conquered only one town with a population over 10,000. This time they triumphed in Toulon, Marignane, and Orange, while one of their own also took over Nice.

Some of the NF's near-wins, where only coalitions of all other parties held them off, are almost as revealing. At Mulhouse, the nationalist was held to 35 percent by a coalition of conservatives and Socialists; at Dreux a "republican front" kept it to 40 percent; at Vitrolles a similar mobilization allowed a Socialist supported by Tapie and other tenors to beat off the nationalist by two percentage points. Noyon, in the Oise, is a small town of 14,600 inhabitants that counts 16 percent immigrants and 14 percent unemployed. Just under half the electorate had voted for Jospin in May. One month later, more than 48 percent voted for a nationalist who was barely defeated by a Gaullist, thanks to the support of the left.

Local elections are not, in the main, about party politics. They are becoming increasingly politicized, as national parties provide convenient banners for local factions and feuds. On the other hand, local issues—jobs, welfare, housing, crime—become increasingly recognizable as national concerns. At Noyon, for example, small shopkeepers blaming the municipality for favoring large discount stores (*grandes surfaces*) voted heavily for the NF; so did the bourgeoisie of central Dreux, besieged by the "Arab-infested" public housing that rings the town. In Paris, where the dominance of the moderate right was broken after twelve years of rule, left-wing coalitions won in six of the capital's twenty districts. In four of the six, the NF's role in splitting the right was decisive.

Another factor proved just as crucial: the same desire for change that won the presidential elections for Chirac. If Mitterrand had been in the Elysée since 1981, the right had run the capital since 1983. Both were accused of dirty dealing, abuses of power, inequitable privileges, and favoritism—and justifiably so. But Parisian incumbents faced yet another grief: urban renewal. The six districts of Paris that Chirac's orphans lost represent 30 percent of the capital's surface and 40 percent of its population, most of it working-class or petty bourgeois. That was just where Mayor Chirac had concentrated the building, lodging, and public equipment projects that were going to provoke incensed reactions against bureaucracy, technocracy, and invasive concrete.

Nothing fails like success when it disturbs reassuring habit in times when reassurance is at a premium. In the third district of Paris, between the National Archives and the Tem-

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ple, a long-run conflict between the mayor, determined to replace a covered market by a new commercial complex, and locals, determined to protect their shopping habits, resulted in Jacques Dominati's defeat by 140 votes (1.4 percent of votes cast). At Levallois-Perret, in the northwestern suburbs, the incumbent mayor, an inveterate builder, was turfed out by an insurgent rightist: "Concrete has had it!" exulted one happy woman voter. Concrete, of course, goes with shady deals, fishy speculations, suspicious profits, all the more malodorous in the midst of joblessness, insecurity, friction between races, rifts between those whom the French describe as "the excluded" and those who may still consider themselves to be included.

In the last few years, French mayors have come to control local taxes, housing, transport, schools, welfare, sporting and cultural activities, and most law enforcement in the towns they lead. The NF program proposes to use these powers for what it describes as national preference, reserving jobs, lodgings, social aid, and school admissions for "French nationals," even though current legislation prohibits discrimination between foreigners and French. Will nationalist mayors apply this program, and, if they do, how will it affect the NF's stock in the public eye? How will a moderate right ruling in extreme times handle the challenge of the extreme right? Will those who fail to solve insoluble problems get their comeuppance at the polls? If politics is the art of the possible, how is a government faced with impossible tasks likely to fare? For the beginnings of an answer, stay tuned for the next installment.

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The Lecture Theater of the Absurd

JOHN LOWE

I sympathize with those wandering scholars of the twelfth century who trudged across France—or farther—to hear the charismatic and controversial Peter Abelard lecture in Paris. For most of them, there was no other way of keeping up with his ideas. Centuries later, the public lecture, in all its forms, has become so embedded in our way of life that we cease to think of it objectively, to question its continuing usefulness, or to recognize some of its absurdities. The public lecture comes in many shapes and sizes, from distinguished and richly endowed academic occasions to the humbler women's garden club affair, where the performer—for that seems the mot juste—must hurry to squeeze his lecture in between the prolonged cold buffet lunch and the early afternoon cup of Earl Grey.

My experience in this field is considerable, but lopsided. I can claim to have given dozens, possibly hundreds, of lectures all over the world, but voluntarily I have only attended four lectures in my life. Involuntarily, and later in life, I have taken part in a large number as chairman. That brought its own agonies and the occasional moment of high comedy; but the latter was mostly enjoyed in retrospect.

I have no idea who gave the first lecture, and, at that early date, it might have been difficult to distinguish between the lecture and the sermon. The distinction can still be difficult to make. We have all been lectured to from the pulpit and preached at from the platform. My own first memories of a lecture are confused with my prep school's Sunday sermon. In those days, many preachers and lecturers shared the common purpose of extracting our pocket money to support their work in the mission field.

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Yes, there were lectures. I recall muscular Christians, silhouetted against a white screen, summoning up with a click of their fingers slides far more obscure than any corner of darkest Africa.

It was at this school, at the age of twelve, that I gave my first public lecture. Without doubt, it was my worst. The headmaster—suitably named Bulley—had read in some magazine that do-it-yourself lectures could be rented: far cheaper than having some chap down from London, and there was no danger of subversive or unexpected remarks, which might make the boys laugh. Some years before, both Auden and Isherwood had been pupils at this school, which may have left Mr. Bulley cautious of the world at large.

I was summoned to his study and told that he had ordered a lecture on pond life. I, as the winner of the school recitation prize—a stirring rendition of Kipling's *Gunga Din*, which could not have been more irrelevant to the ways of *ephemeroptera*—was to deliver it.

"But . . . " I began to protest, only to be cut short with the assurance that the slides came with a set of notes, which I should have a week to study. If that were not enough, there would be a lighted lectern to enable me to consult the notes during the lecture.

Of course, the slides arrived one day before the lecture, and the bulb in the lectern failed to work. I remember the first slide. Up on the screen came a vastly enlarged water boatman, though the barely readable notes confused me further by listing it as *notonecta*. All in all, it was the longest hour of my life, and it still surprises me that I was ever able to speak in public again.

During my five years at an English public school, I must have attended several compulsory lectures. I only remember one of them. It was given by Field Marshal Viscount Mont-

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gomery. Before the lecture, the most senior boys were introduced to "Monty," who, in his typically officious way, told the head of the school "to get a haircut." Report of the incident went round the school faster than wildfire. We considered it a gross infringement of our civil liberties, and his lecture received an icy reception. It is possible that the boys were expressing their dislike of the lecture, rather than the lecturer. More likely, it was both.

Monty's style of delivery was extraordinary, not helped by his thin, high voice. None of his sentences contained more than five words, all of three or fewer syllables. This telegraphic simplicity may have been a foolproof method of conveying his appreciation of the situation to his aides in the field. It was no way to hold the attention of a young audience for an hour.

I went willingly to a lecture by John Betjeman on Victorian architecture. It remains one of the best and funniest lectures I have ever heard. In the forties Betjeman was making his name as both a poet and a tireless defender of Victorian architecture. He led us through the highways and especially the byways of his beloved neo-Gothic, his knowledge enforced by his enthusiasm and bubbling humor. We complained afterward that he made us laugh so much we only heard about half of what he said.

I also remember a more informal occasion. Harold Nicolson—diplomat, politician, writer, and a man of exceptional charm and humor—gave a talk to the senior boys about his experiences as a diplomat in Germany before the Second World War. He told many good stories, and one has remained in my memory for fifty years. He was at an official German dinner party, when a leading Nazi politician asked with total seriousness, "Tell me, Herr Nicolson, how do the British organize their weekend movement?" I also remember that the room was crowded and that I sat on the floor at Harold Nicolson's feet. I was fascinated to see that this distinguished person was wearing odd socks. With hindsight, I don't suppose that laundry was Vita Sackville-West's strong suit.

But how, you may ask, did I get through university without attending many compulsory lectures? Well, Oxford is a law unto itself, its teaching based on the tutorial system, with courses of lectures available as fringe benefits. When I first met my tutor, he gave me a glass of sherry and one excellent piece of advice: "Don't waste your time going to lectures." I wasted my time on a large number of things, but lectures were not amongst them.

There were a few exceptions. In Oxford of the 1950s, regardless of their own disciplines, undergraduates flocked to the lectures of Lord David Cecil and Isaiah Berlin. With entirely different styles, both were charismatic speakers, possessed of that indefinable magic, star quality.

Lord David, in his languid but compelling manner, gently breathed life into English literature.

Isaiah Berlin gripped his audience, although his subject was probably beyond many of them. Words hurtled from his lips like bullets from a Gatling gun, and he had a rare gift for creating an air of intellectual excitement. This is by no means limited to the lecture theater. An afternoon cup of tea with Isaiah Berlin and an agreeable hour of conversation can leave one with the exhilarating feeling that one has been engaged in an hour of higher thought.

I cannot remember why I went to a lecture by Professor Tolkien. The cult of the Hobbits had not yet taken root. I think it must have been a last attempt to find a glimmer of interest in *Beowulf* from this most eminent of experts. Determined to miss nothing, I sat in the front row, hardly six feet from Tolkien. Had it been possible to sit in his breast pocket, it would still have been a total waste of time. During that hour I did not hear a word he said. Before starting to speak, he tucked his chin—and his mouth—deep into the folds of his tie and was eminently inaudible throughout. I was so disappointed, I never attended a lecture at Oxford again. But it did start me wondering if some learned men should stick to writing.

I left Oxford to join the Department of Woodwork—a workman-like William Morris sort of title now abandoned for "Furniture"—at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was there that my own lecture career began. I had hardly hung up my coat in my new office when the door opened and a lady, who turned out to be Helen Lowenthal, senior docent, swept in. Now Helen was a person whom many saw as irresistibly enthusiastic; others saw her as a trifle bossy. I was about to be overwhelmed by both facets of her character. She enjoyed some reputation and consider-

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able affection in the United States as one of the founders of the National Trust Summer School at Attingham. Attingham was to become part of my own summers, but not quite yet—first things first.

"The extra-mural department of London University are organizing courses on the decorative arts next winter. I hope you will give the twelve lectures on the history of English furniture."

I was dumbfounded. I knew how to spell *Chippendale*, but little else. Helen took my silence as assent.

"Excellent. I knew you'd help. The first lecture is on medieval furniture. One hour, and you'll probably get about thirty people."

One hour! Thirty people! Medieval furniture—we only had two pieces in the museum, and they were both thought to be fakes. How was I to hold the attention of an audience for a whole hour, speaking on a subject about which I knew next to nothing and that, for all I knew, hardly existed? I had been thrown into the deep end, and, frankly, I was drowning.

Fortunately, there were four months before the start of the course, and I worked very hard. As the first lecture drew near, an obsession grew that I might, long before the hour was up, run out of anything to say.

The evening came, and I entered the lecture theater carrying close to one hundred slides—mostly illustrations from medieval manuscripts—and an equal abundance of notes. Had I been more experienced, I would have realized that I had brought enough material for six of the twelve lectures. In the event, by skipping one box of slides, I did not speak for much over *two* hours. It took time to learn that most audiences are grateful if the speaker calls a halt after fifty-five minutes.

I had forgotten an excellent piece of advice given to me while I was doing a teacher training course in the army. "Always," said the instructor, "you will, if you are lucky, have the full attention of your class for the first five minutes, and the last three."

In the fifties and sixties, particularly in the art world, lecturing was a growth industry on both sides of the Atlantic, and my main subject, "The English Country House," seemed popular. I had hardly given my twelve lectures on English furniture before I was booked by London University for another course. For this course I spent a lot of time in my car or on the train traveling to speak to a variety of societies, everywhere from Oxford to Tunbridge Wells to the chilly halls of villages barely on the map.

Tunbridge Wells was a unique experience. I arrived to find that I was giving my illustrated talk in the Adult Education Centre, where other lectures were taking place that evening. I started to speak, and the projectionist plunged the room into darkness. I called for the first slide, and it came up on the screen without delay. I spoke a little more and called for the second slide. Nothing happened for about five seconds. Then there was a scuffling sound from the back of the room, and the second slide appeared.

These embarrassing hiatuses continued, the pauses growing longer. I was mystified. Was the projectionist ill or drunk? Or was he, for some unimaginable reason, trying to sabotage my lecture? He had seemed helpful enough when I handed him my slides. Such thoughts passed through my mind as I struggled to maintain continuity in my account of the Tudor merchant's household.

We limped on in this way to the tenth slide, but on calling for the eleventh, there was total silence from the back of the room and slide ten remained on the screen. I could stand it no longer and walked through the audience to the projector. The projectionist had vanished. There was nothing for it but to project my own slides and to give the rest of the lecture from behind the audience.

The explanation was simple. Another slide lecture was being given in the adjacent room. Two projectionists had been booked. One had fallen ill at the last moment. The second man, foolishly, had thought that he could juggle his way between two lectures. Poor man—he meant well—but he was undone when the projector in the other room broke down. In his determination to repair it, my lecture went completely out of his head.

With experience, one learns to take all the quirks of projectionists in one's stride. I recall arriving somewhere to give a talk on Japanese gardens, for which the slides were of particular importance. "Have no fear," boomed the dominating chairperson. "I can't promise much, but we do have the most expert projectionist in the south of England. You'll have no worries with her."

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I mounted the stage and started my brief introduction. Glancing down the hall, I could just see my dependable projectionist. It looked to me as if she was leaning forward at a distinctly unalert angle. I called for the first slide. Nothing happened. There was complete silence in the hall, broken suddenly by a soft but unmistakable snore. Well, inept as I am, I had never before put a projectionist, or any member of my audience, to sleep in the first three minutes.

I have had occasional troubles with individual members of the audience. Each winter at the Victoria and Albert we had a series of lectures on Thursday evenings. They were mostly given by distinguished outside lecturers, with one or two given by members of the staff. In those days, the museum provided shelter and free warmth to a small number of local and rather dotty elderly women, known irreverently to the staff as the Kensington Gerties.

The Thursday evening lectures were the favorite haunt of the most formidable, and probably the dottiest, of these ladies. She always sat immediately in front of the lecturer, her purpose being to monitor what she obsessively considered bad manners in a public speaker. If the lecturer was so casual as to put his hand in his trouser pocket—an act she took as a personal insult—she had been known to stand up and denounce the offender.

I confess that it is my habit to put my hand in my pocket when speaking. But the first time I confronted this lady, I had not been warned of her dementia. I was just getting into my stride, with my left hand moving pocketward, when I saw the lady rising slowly from her seat. Slightly distracted, I placed both hands on the desk and saw her subside. Before long, my hand moved back toward my pocket, and, with perfect synchronization, the lady began her upward progression again. Her peculiar behavior, her wild look, and a somewhat disheveled style of dress caused the penny to drop. I kept both hands well in view and avoided a public dressing down.

Of all those who contributed to these Thursday evenings, the most memorable was Kenneth Clark. He was acclaimed as the best lecturer in Britain, long before he established an international reputation on television with his *Civilization* series. If Clark was a genius—and I believe he was—his talent as both a writer and a lecturer was based on Thomas Edison's recipe of 99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration. He left nothing to chance with his lectures. He wrote a carefully polished script, which he virtually learned by heart and, it is said, rehearsed its delivery in front of a mirror. The result was a perfect performance, and he is the only lecturer I have ever heard who read his lecture, yet made it sound as if the words were spoken spontaneously.

Another Thursday evening performer—and I use that word advisedly—was my colleague, John Beckwith, distinguished Byzantinist and diva of the international lecture circuit. John adored a warm audience, and he was an excellent and entertaining lecturer. He was also the only academic I have ever known who, at the end of his lecture, grasped an imaginary curtain and went into a carefully rehearsed routine of deep bows.

There was no chairman for those Thursday evenings, and any rage or ruffled feelings were left to sort themselves out. I never chaired a lecture until I had left the Victoria and Albert, but I remember a cautionary tale about this occupation told to me by the then director—my immediate boss and old friend—Trenchard Cox.

Immediately after the Second World War, Trenchard was appointed director of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. It had been closed during the war, and it was his job to breathe new life into the place—into not just the fabric, but also bodies like the Friends of the Museum.

As part of this program, Trenchard was delighted when Sir Leigh Ashton, the distinguished postwar director of the Victoria and Albert, agreed to give a lecture to the Birmingham Friends on museum lighting. Not exactly an enthralling subject—and a strange choice for a man who could not have changed a lightbulb—but a catch nonetheless. The evening arrived, the hall was packed, and Trenchard led the distinguished guest onto the platform.

Trenchard did admit to me later that he thought he detected the smell of whisky when he met Sir Leigh at Birmingham station and that he couldn't help noticing that Sir Leigh went rather hard at the sherry during the small gathering before the lecture. Trenchard is exceptionally charitable, but he is also

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shrewd, and he saw a small cloud forming on the evening's horizon.

He introduced Sir Leigh to the audience, emphasizing the great honor it was to have him and assuring him that the large audience could hardly wait to hear all he had to say on his chosen subject, "Museum Lighting." He sat down as waves of applause summoned Sir Leigh to the lectern. Sir Leigh seemed to be having some difficulty in getting out of his chair. There was an awkward pause, until the chairman felt compelled to get up again and give the lecturer a hand. At last he was at the lectern, which he gripped gratefully with both hands.

He gazed out across the audience, seemingly unaware of them—or anything else. There was an agonizing pause. Suddenly, with an obvious effort, he took hold of himself. "Er . . . museum lighting," he said, smiling enigmatically. "There are two kinds of museum lighting—tungsten and fluorescent." And with that definitive statement he slipped silently to the floor, to be carried out in a contented slumber by the chairman and others.

I have had difficult moments chairing lectures, though nothing as traumatic as that. I do remember being involved in another Birmingham occasion of a rather different kind. I was asked to chair a lecture by the already well known painter, David Hockney. Hockney was there on time, in his characteristic rather crumpled white suit, and so was a large audience of young people. I introduced Hockney briefly and sat down. Hockney stood up to speak, but remained silent. He had no notes, and after a long minute, I suspected that he had thought of nothing to say.

After another minute of silence, with the audience growing restive, I knew that I must intervene, but I also realized that my knowledge about our distinguished, if muted, guest was limited to some incident during his last year at the Royal College of Art. It was not a memory likely to stimulate him into sudden eloquence.

When the silence became unbearable, I asked the artist a simple biographical question. He looked neither relieved nor pleased and answered with deliberate brevity. We struggled on in this way for fifty minutes, when I brought the proceedings to an end with a suitably brief word of thanks. Mr. Hockney neither explained nor apologized. Like the White Rabbit—in a crumpled suit—he looked at his watch and hurried away. I thought to myself, we should have invited Salvador Dalí. He had never been known to stop talking.

Trenchard Cox was directly responsible for my presence in Birmingham. Indirectly, he was responsible for a fiasco in Mexico, where I was the guest lecturer leading a cultural tour. Trenchard's generous nature led him to recommend those he held in high esteem for a variety of posts, for which they were largely unqualified. I was presented to one of his friends, who ran a London travel agency, as "the man who probably knows more about Mexico than anyone else in Britain." I had made a few visits to Mexico, but "expert"—certainly not.

But the agency's requirements did not seem too demanding. I planned a three-week tour and thought that I could lead the group without making a fool of myself. Then the manager had a brain wave. "It seems such a waste," he mused, without a trace of irony, "to have such a great authority as yourself without giving you the opportunity to paint in the historical background. How about giving *two* introductory lectures on the first morning?"

I knew enough about Mexican history to be aware of the difficulties it presented to a lecturer. The early history is full of archaeological speculation, while many of the names involved are hard to remember and difficult to pronounce. I decided to devote the first lecture to pre-Columbian history and the second to the Spanish Colonial period. I was only encouraged by one thing. During previous visits I had taken a large number of good color slides, everything from Mayan sites to Augustinian missionary churches. "Splendid," said the manager of the agency. "We'll send your courier out two days in advance to supervise the arrangements for the lectures."

I set to work, trying to unravel that tangle of pre-Columbian cultures—Olmecs, Toltecs, Tepanecs, Chichimecs, Aztecs—the similarity of their names making a simple exposition all the harder.

At the same time—on the bus or in the bath—I repeated a litany of unpronounceable key words that no *expert* could afford to stumble over. Passengers in the bus eyed me as I mumbled to myself: "Chichén Itza, Popocatépetl, Teotihuacán, Tenochtitlán, and

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Huitzilopochtli." Perhaps they thought I was an avant-garde poet. Despite all this work, I put my faith almost entirely in the color slides, which, I hoped, would distract the audience from the gaps in my knowledge.

Perhaps I should explain: I always speak extempore. That word is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as "without notes or preparation," so it does not exactly describe my method. I do a great deal of preparation and have minimal notes; with an illustrated lecture, I simply have a list of the slides. I enjoy the freedom to think as I go along and to adjust my talk to the mood of the audience.

I concede that on certain academic occasions the speaker will be expected to read from a prepared script. This is usually rather boring, made worse by the knowledge that in a month or two one can read the text in the comfort of one's own room and that the subject matter is seldom urgent. On the few occasions when I have given a lecture that is to be published, I preferred to give the lecture and to write it afterward: the process of ad-libbing nearly always stimulates some new thoughts.

Lecturing is a performance, if not exactly a theatrical one. I once asked a well-known British actor how he would like to try and hold the attention of an audience for one hour, without a script. "Unthinkable," he replied. "Matinees can be difficult enough, even with the help of Shakespeare."

With such solemn thoughts, I boarded the flight to Mexico City, the precious slides in my briefcase. With their help, I might survive tomorrow's double ordeal. The lectures were due to start at nine. I was in the room ten minutes early. It had been totally blacked out, so the slides would show to maximum advantage. Everything seemed in good order. Toward the back of the room were our courier and the projector. I walked over. As I did so, I saw the strangely unfamiliar shape of the slide projector reveal itself in the all-too-familiar shape of a *film* projector. It was a Sunday, and there was no possibility of making an exchange. I was about to embark on two hours of Mexican history that, in my mind, I had prepared to present visually.

I survived. I would not put it higher than that. I sat down at 11:30—drained. Our courier stood up and announced, "In fifteen minutes Mr. Lowe has kindly agreed to give us a guided tour of the center of Mexico City."

I had agreed to no such thing. It must have been another brain wave of that predatory manager—one he had not dared tell me about.

For the next hour, with what voice I had left, I fought against the noise of the traffic, trying to enthuse about the spaciousness of the Zocalo and the splendors of the cathedral. At one o'clock, I called a halt and slipped away to a favorite bar just by the national pawnshop. It remains the best glass of beer of my whole life.

Years later, I suffered a different humiliation. Those who stand up to speak must be prepared to be put down. Lecturing is a high-risk occupation, and in my experience, lectures organized by the British Council tend to double that risk. When I was living in Kyoto, the British Council offices were closed for a year while they were appointing a new director. The new man arrived, and he was keen to organize a few events to revitalize the place. He asked me to contribute a course of lectures.

Shakespeare will always draw a good audience in Japan. I suggested three lectures about Shakespeare, the talks centering on *The Tempest* and culminating in a showing of the BBC's new film of that play, which the British Council promised to obtain. Shakespeare did draw a large audience from all over the region. It was the most receptive audience I ever spoke to in Japan, which made the denouement the more awful.

Throughout the first three lectures, I referred to the BBC film, building up the expectations of the audience and emphasizing that it would illuminate much of what I was trying to say about Shakespeare's art. The long-awaited moment arrived, and I launched into my final rhapsody: the settings, the costumes, the stars of the contemporary British theater. I had the audience on the edge of their seats. As I sat down, the projector flickered into life.

I don't know from what archive the British Council had disinterred that film. It was *The Tempest*, but it was in black and white, scarred with scratches, and, even when new—1948 perhaps—it was the most unimaginative interpretation of that beautiful play I had ever seen.

And once it had started, there was nothing to do but let it run. At least that gave me time to think up some kind of apology to give to

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the audience. Only a Japanese audience had the restraint not to walk out. In one of those satirical Ealing comedies, it might have been funny. In real life, it was horrendous.

I should have been warned by an earlier calamity with the British Council. In the days of the Cold War, Britain had cultural agreements with East European countries, under which art exhibitions and art historians were exchanged. Sometimes the visits had a practical purpose, but I suspect I was sent to Romania because nobody else wanted to go. During my briefing, I was asked if I would give one lecture on the Georgian Country House. I imagined that I was to address some cosmopolitan audience in Bucharest.

I enjoyed my stay there, but the lecture was not mentioned. I presumed that it had been forgotten. However, somewhere in Transylvania, my guide said, "Please bring your slides tomorrow. You are speaking at the co-operative." Co-operative? Some kind of rural university? An architectural study center? The deeper we drove into the country, the more puzzled I became.

But it was exactly what my guide had said—a large state farm—and I found myself facing an audience of forty Romanian peasants. I struggled on, deeply embarrassed, the lecture painfully prolonged by the meticulous translation given by my humorless guide. As we drove away, I could not help wondering if I had been used as some kind of recherché punishment for a cadre who had failed to achieve their production target.

I don't lecture now. I no longer have the stamina or, perhaps, the impudence. When I gave my last lecture, a few years ago, I knew I was past it. Now, I am long past it. And looking back, I feel I have run the gamut of this demanding profession. I have given the endowed lecture; the problem there was to find a subject so obscure as to outwit one's alarmingly clever and hypercritical audience. I have faced row upon row of bright-faced students and given a variety of "soufflé" talks to groups of ladies on both sides of the Atlantic.

Perhaps my strangest experience was speaking to more than three thousand people packed into Chichester cathedral. I was not preaching a sermon, but I was one of five speakers at a unique town meeting, campaigning for the proper conservation of this beautiful English city. At the other end of the scale, I have always enjoyed talking *with* children; one does not talk *to* them. They have such a low boredom threshold and no inhibitions about expressing their feelings. But set them alight—audience participation is essential—and anything may happen. I was once talking to a group of five-year-old Japanese children about the sights of London. To their teacher's horror, they rose en masse to get a much closer look at the slide of a red London bus. Of course, the screen went flying, and I thought their teacher was going to have a nervous breakdown.

And it was a special kind of accolade when years ago I drove deep into the wintery English countryside, arriving at my destination to find an audience of two. It should have been an audience of one, but the caretaker insisted on staying on, "to swell the numbers," as she put it.

I do not think I have developed any particular philosophy from all these absurd experiences, except to be philosophical about each new disaster. I do suspect that good lecturers are born, not made, and that the others would be well advised not to throw their hats into this particular ring. We have all suffered the bad lecturer. We shun the bores at our clubs. Why should we put up with them on the platform?

It is strange that no formal training exists for lecturers. All other communicators—telephonists, toastmasters, preachers, politicians—can take a course in their chosen skill. Yet, each year, in innumerable universities around the world, young men and women are appointed lecturers and mysteriously are expected to be instantly eloquent. One can only presume that the *art* of lecturing is not taken seriously, or that those in authority have failed to recognize that *art* is involved.

You may wonder how I learned to lecture. I had no formal training, but I had some luck. Brought up in the world of the theater, and deeply involved in amateur drama at school, I took all forms of public speaking seriously, appreciated the difficulties, and realized that one must acquire various skills. After that, only practice and experience and a continual analysis of one's performance brought improvement. And I confess that I have never given a lecture, however humble, without suffering from nerves all day. But they always vanished the moment I began to speak. They say

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that stage fright puts an edge on the performance.

Lecturing has its good and its bad moments. Out there, somewhere, waiting for you is that audience that will defeat all your skills and, worse, your enthusiasm. You will recognize them in the first three minutes, by which time you will be half-suffocated by their mental inertia and total lack of interest in anything you have to say. There is nothing you can do about it. Of course, professionalism demands that you struggle on to the end. I have fought my way through that cold forest of indifference more than once. I'm afraid that I have left the platform, muttering bitterly to myself, "Education . . . artificial pearls before real swine."

And, from time to time, there are occasions when one achieves a near-perfect rapport with the audience, when education and entertainment are exactly balanced, each enhancing the other, and even one's jokes seem funnier. At such euphoric moments, the lecturer would do well to remember that he performs in the theater of the absurd, whose stage is well furnished with concealed trapdoors.

I should know. I seem to have fallen through most of them.

Just

PETER FILKINS

Like the patch of violets
that appears just as the lawn
has gotten out of hand
each spring, the daffodils,
just having lost their petals,
toss in the breeze outside
the window that holds a view
where nothing in particular
happens, just a boat
that scarcely seems to sway
on the lake, its surface just
barely disturbed, just lovely
after last night's storm—
just what I meant to tell you.

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MEMOIR

The Last Man of Letters

Julian Symons

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

In a 1991 afterword to *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters,* John Gross admits that the title is an exaggeration: "Rise yes—but Fall? Men and women of letters were still with us when this book was first published; they are still with us today." Nonetheless the professionalization of literary studies in the university, the ubiquity of literary theory, and the various "cultural studies" alternatives to literature currently available have indeed issued in what Mr. Gross calls, cautiously, "a diminished role" for the species of reader-critic that his book catalogues. More incautiously, the man of letters might be termed a dying breed, or—as a publican put it about his brethren in a Kingsley Amis novel, "We're a dime breed. Dine out like the dinosaurs." The breed of men of letters suffered a notable and much regretted diminishment in late 1994 when Julian Symons, a shining example of that way of living and writing, died at the age of eighty-two. Novelist, biographer, cultural historian, poet, and indefatigable reviewer of every sort of book, he was, as his friend George Orwell described the species in "Why I Write," one of the "minority of gifted, willful people who are determined to live their own lives to the end"—and who do this preeminently through writing.

In my judgment the three foremost English men of letters whose lives more or less spanned this century are Geoffrey Grigson, V. S. Pritchett, and Julian Symons. Grigson died in 1985; Pritchett (now Sir Victor and about to be ninety-five) ceased to publish some years back. But Julian Symons, who began his career writing poems and criticism in the late 1930s, sustained a heavy schedule of literary production to the very end, even after he was diagnosed as terminally ill with cancer.

Like Grigson and Pritchett, Symons never attended university. Son of an English mother and an emigrant Russian Jewish father, whose feckless character included a vagueness as to just exactly what his name was ("Symons" was an adopted Englishy one), Julian was the youngest of four children who grew up in a large house in Clapham, South London. In his memoir, *Notes from Another Country,* he wrote about the stammer that afflicted him as a child, causing him eventually to be sent off for a time to a school for backward children. In fact, his significant "schooling" was really the tutelage of his brother A. J. A. Symons—a truly fabulous character, author of *The Quest for Corvo,* connoisseur and promulgator of rare editions and fine wines, dead at forty-one, and the subject of his youngest brother's first and most original biography (*A. J. A. Symons: His Life and Speculations,* 1950). With A. J.'s encouragement and suggestions, Julian read widely and promiscuously. The fruits of that reading may be seen in the calm authority that came to inform his critical writings.

But as a young man of twenty-four, when he brought out the first issue of his little magazine *Twentieth Century Verse*—it ran for two years until the war put paid to such ventures—Symons struck a rather different tone from the calmly dispassionate one:

> We do not stand on any platform, do not believe that poetry is in some odd way a tributary of politics, or music, or machinery. . . . We are not publishing for Sunday School teachers, nor, on

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other hand, are we much interested in such already outworn acrobatic parlour tricks as those of Mr. E. E. Cummings.

A request for subscriptions, sent out to one thousand prospective readers, was responded to by a grand total of nine who were willing to put their four shillings on the line. Symons was undeterred: "We are not a political magazine and do not admit that poetry need be concerned with politics," he wrote in the second issue. "Our object is to print good poems preferably by young poets." As an editor, his model was Grigson, whose magazine *New Verse*, a bimonthly, had been running since 1933. *New Verse* was still going strong, mainly as a vehicle for publishing the Auden group and for Grigson to use the "billhook" (as he later called it) on various poetasters and the overpraised undeserving. While *Twentieth Century Verse* was by no means unfriendly to Auden and poets associated with him (there is a good appreciation of MacNeice by Symons in one of the issues), "young poets" such as Roy Fuller, D. S. Savage, Ruthven Todd, Gavin Ewart, Kenneth Allott, and Symons himself were given space to display their wares. The magazine was especially interesting, however, for its attention—not uncritical, but sympathetic—to American poetry, as seen in Symons's essay "How Wide Is the Atlantic?" and his running of an American poets issue that included Wallace Stevens, Yvor Winters, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke, Conrad Aiken, and others. In 1940 Symons would write one of the first intelligent English appreciations of Stevens, as well as a balanced piece on Hart Crane as a "failed genius."

But *Twentieth Century Verse*, like Grigson's magazine, is fun to read largely because of the provocative, even cheeky tone in which bad poets were dismissed—as in this bit from a Symons review of three slim volumes by poets now forgotten. "Here are three ways of not writing poems," the notice begins; he then proceeds to quote examples from each writer and concludes:

> Mr. Peacock's words are pedantically dull, Miss Stanley-Wrench's words naively dull, Mr. Ford's words sophisticatedly dull. Mr. Peacock has been printed by *Scrutiny*, Miss Stanley-Wrench won the Newdigate, Mr. Ford's poems are introduced by W. C. Williams; and there is nothing in their books to balance these serious disadvantages.

How did a young man in his mid-twenties become so assured in the bravura way he laid down pronouncements about what his magazine was for or against and which poets were worthy and which not? Such bravura that allows no doubt or ambiguity to color the critic's judgments undoubtedly had to do with Symons's early apprenticeship to the figure he called—in an issue of *Twentieth Century Verse* dedicated to him—"the most valuable and interesting writer of our century." This was Wyndham Lewis, whose "width of vision" Symons particularly admired and whom he saw from time to time during the late thirties. "Meeting Wyndham Lewis," a short memoir he wrote twenty years later, amusingly describes what it was like to have "lunch" with Lewis at the latter's studio in Notting Hill: four hard-boiled eggs, bread, butter, and a bottle of whisky, accompanied by intense conversation about ideas, books, and writers. Over the course of his life, Symons wrote on Lewis often, reviewed books by and about him, and noted in an eightieth-birthday interview that the two major influences on him as a young man were Nietzsche and Lewis: "What a pair, some will say—no wonder he came to no good." This nice piece of wit, which holds one's younger self in humorous perspective, is typical of the benign irony that permeates all of Symons's writing and distinguishes it from the fierce and sometimes humorless "genius" of Lewis, not to say Nietzsche.

It was through the spirit of Wyndham Lewis that I moved into Julian Symons's orbit. While writing a book on Lewis, I had looked up the issue of *Twentieth Century Verse* devoted to him and, in the course of so doing, became interested in Symons as well. When I landed in London in 1968 for a sabbatical year, I sent Symons a copy of the book, but had no high expectations of his liking or even reading it. To my great delight he responded almost immediately, saying that he not only liked it very much but would set about to review it, if possible, in the *Times Literary Supplement*. He further suggested that we have lunch together at The Salisbury, a pub with much ornate glass on St. Martin's Lane, where he and Lewis used to meet. No fear that I should be unable to identify him, he said, just look for "the oldest graybeard in the place."

I found him, we had a drink and then went on to a Chinese restaurant where he had booked

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a table. He showed himself to be both a good trencherman and a companionable drinker, and he picked up the tab. I was exhilarated at what felt like an entrance to literary London, and I was charmed as well by a combination of intelligence, wit, and human kindness that never diminished in the twenty-six years of friendship to follow.

At this point in his literary career, Symons was fifty-six and had turned out an impressive number of books of various sorts. His series of crime novels began in 1945 with the publication of a manuscript that his wife, Kathleen, found in a drawer. *The Immaterial Murder Case,* a send-up of the detective story, was followed by thirteen others, the latest of which—*The Man Who Killed Himself* (1967)—showed Symons at the top of his form. These novels were accompanied by a number of non-fiction works. There were biographies of his brother A. J., of Thomas Carlyle (still an excellent introduction to Carlyle's life and works), and of the now-forgotten journalist and rogue-financier, Horatio Bottomley. There were historical studies of the expedition to relieve General Gordon at Khartoum; of Sir Redvers Buller's campaign in the Boer War; and of the General Strike of 1926. A collection of essays, *Critical Occasions* (1966), contained notable reminiscences of his friendships with Wyndham Lewis and George Orwell. (Orwell had helped to get Symons started in his journalistic career by recommending him as a replacement to write a book column that Orwell himself had written for the Manchester *Evening News.*) After two early volumes of verse, Symons ceased to publish poems, though later on he brought out two small pamphlets of them.

As I began to acquaint myself with his fiction, it was with the sense that, rather than reading a bona fide novel, I was instead reading a "crime novel." By adding that qualifying adjective (crime), my reading seemed less than serious—it became an activity to which one might treat oneself before dozing off. Symons himself, never one for self-promotion, was offhand and self-depreciating about his contributions as a novelist. After all, "thrillers," detective fiction, and crime stories were lumped together, reviewed separately from "real" novels, and usually reviewed by another crime novelist. There was an air of quaintness and indulgence about the whole operation. He never suggested to me that I would be missing much if I neglected to read the novels he'd written so far—and there he misled me.

In *Bloody Murder,* a history of the genre (*From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* is its subtitle), Symons drew a distinction between "serious novelists" and "entertainers." The former are emotionally involved in their work, offering personal feelings about the world and society; the latter think always and only of what will amuse their audience, thereby eschewing any truck with ideas. But this must be too simple a distinction, since in most good novelists "ideas" and "entertainment" are bound up together in their art. Robert Frost liked to say that he entertained ideas to see if they entertained him. With a few exceptions, Symons's novels, early and later, are consistently entertaining, moving along briskly with executive skill, showing us character through well-registered individual voices that are presided over by a narrator not averse to making mischief. Consider the opening paragraph of *The Man Who Killed Himself:*

> In the end Arthur Brownjohn killed himself, but in the beginning he made up his mind to murder his wife. He did so on the day that Major Easonby Mellon met Patricia Parker. Others might have come to such a decision earlier, but Arthur Brownjohn was a patient and, as all those who knew him agreed, a timid and long-suffering man. When people say that a man is long-suffering they mean that they see no reason why he should not suffer forever.

That final sentence is not only entertaining but offers an idea I'd never entertained before.

Brownjohn, a henpecked husband living with his wife, Clare, in a London suburb, doubles half the week as Major Easonby Mellon, a shady operator who runs a matrimonial assistance office in the city. When Brownjohn is supposedly traveling for his electrics firm, he in fact assumes his other life, while pretending to Joan—the woman with whom he lives part of the week in London—that he's in government secret service. Brownjohn is repressed, the slave of Clare; Major Mellon is indulged, sexually and otherwise, by Joan. So it stands until the plot begins to thicken as the attractive Patricia Parker pays a visit to the major in his office, initiating a train of events: "There could be no doubt that two women and two lives presented a problem, especially when a man was really interested in a third." So

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Brownjohn decides Clare must cease to exist: "A life without Clare! The prospect was almost too heady to contemplate. Contemplating it, he fell asleep." In Symons's best novels, such as this one, the comic perspective is never absent for long. It's partly a matter of narrative tone, partly the incidental but real satisfactions of encountering pleasing expressions and bits of slang that at least this American reader hadn't previously encountered. Someone wondering whether a couple is happy asks if it's all "tickety-boo" with them; cockneyisms, like "on your Franchot Tone" (being on your own) or "a bit Harry Groggers" (being tired), have a way of cropping up. There is enlivening energy in Symons's sentences.

After early experiments with the donnish detective story (*Bland Beginning*, 1949), Eric Ambleresque international intrigue (*The Broken Penny*, 1953), and first-person tough-guy narrative à la Raymond Chandler (*The Narrowing Circle*, 1954), Symons settled down to write mainly third-person omniscient narratives with a built-in playful doubleness of tone that informs character and atmosphere. For all his modesty to me about how seriously to take his fiction, he insisted later in our conversation that the best crime fictions were indeed "good novels" that should be reviewed alongside other novels. And he adduced Hammett's *The Glass Key*, Symons's favorite crime story, as comparable to what "serious" novelists such as Hemingway and Faulkner were producing at the same time. The point can be made contemporaneously by mentioning Ruth Rendell—whose work Symons admired—as a novelist no less serious and often a good deal more interesting than such compatriots as A. S. Byatt or Margaret Drabble or Beryl Bainbridge. His old friend, the Canadian writer George Woodcock, put the case succinctly in a biographical entry he once wrote about Symons the novelist:

> He is concerned with the decay of a society, with cultural pretenses, with politics as a corrupting element, with the manners of a world he has made his own: the Bohemian borderland where failed artists and hack writers, advertisement men and broadcasters, and their lesser hangers on, come together to create a setting whose very alienation from moral stability tends to encourage the emergence of crime.

Symons has learned his lesson from Wyndham Lewis, added Woodcock, perhaps thinking of such alienations from moral stability as Lewis explored in novels like *The Revenge for Love* or *The Vulgar Streak*.

By the 1970s Symons had established himself as an all-purpose reviewer on both sides of the Atlantic, even as his productivity on different fronts, if anything, increased. In 1972, for example, he published his darkest crime novel, *The Players and the Game*, with its acknowledged reference to the Moors Murders. That same year appeared the first edition—there would eventually be three—of *Bloody Murder* (*Mortal Consequences* in this country). Finally, less well known but to my taste thoroughly indispensable, is the too-short memoir, *Notes from Another Country*. The memoir takes a look back at such matters as his adolescence in South London, the days of *Twentieth Century Verse*, his employment at the Victoria Lighting and Dynamo Company where he worked until, despite his best efforts to avoid it, he was drafted. The brief, un-brilliant career of his army service—cut short because of a botched operation on one arm, after which he was discharged—provides some of the best comic writing in the book.

At the end of *Notes from Another Country*, Symons writes of being sixty and of how much more he looks forward to living and understanding life ("postpone that coronary or street accident for another few years if you please"), and he then concludes with the kind of measured sense of things that informs his work generally. On the whole, he says, he adheres to Montaigne, who wrote, "The finest lives are, in my opinion, those which conform to the common and human model in an orderly way, with no marvels and no extravagances." Symons adds:

> I have moods in which I do not think this is true: but most of the time I believe it, and then it is a powerful consolation for the fact that I shall never again inhabit the other country about which these notes are written.

So when, in the same book, he uncharacteristically confesses that "the thing I regret most in my life is the lack of deep and high creative talent as a writer," it is the exceptional yearning to be marvelous and extravagant that proves his daily orderly rule of writing from

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9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. and produces the steady work accumulating from such a procedure.

One evening in the winter of 1974, when I was spending another sabbatical year in London, attempting to lead the literary life by getting published in the English weeklies, I had dinner with Julian and, in a moment of expansiveness, suggested he might like to serve a year as Visiting Writer at Amherst College. I was about to become chairman of the English Department and thought I could use my power in such a way as to benefit us all. Julian, who had never taught a class in his life, was enthusiastic about the idea, which eventually came to pass—though not without some obstreperous opposition from younger members of the department who didn't agree, evidently, that this elder British crime writer was the proper person to inspire young creative writers. Nevertheless it worked out very much for the best.

The Symonses came to Amherst in mid-August, spent their first few nights in the momentarily vacant Emily Dickinson house (discovering a dead mouse under the bed on their first morning), and stayed on through the academic year. While he was there, Julian wrote most of his biography of Poe and was also a huge success as a teacher, not only of poetry and fiction writing but also of crime fiction. He participated as well in our introductory staff course where, overambitiously, we read everything from Virgil to Matthew Arnold to Flannery O'Connor. In the weekly meetings, he was a source of literary knowledge and also provided, from time to time, the needed deflationary comment on overenthusiastic professorial enthusiasms.

In an engaging essay written after he returned to London ("A Year in Academe," in *Critical Observations*, 1981), he poked some fun at our habits, but he also noted that he came away impressed "by a sort of fervour, a sense of dedication to scholarly ideals in the faculty." There was also, to be sure, "a hint of self-conscious superiority" that went with this. But, as one student put it, Amherst was indeed "Camelot," and Julian agreed: "Camelot, given stability and severity by quite a bit of New England highmindedness." This seemed to him, on the whole, "a good recipe for a liberal education."

The Amherst students who took his classes that year were fortunate to be exposed to a working critic, untouched by any academic system or vocabulary, willing to say—in response to various undergraduate judgments and assertions, "Yes, but . . ." This was the true teacher's and critic's principled role, which more than once had been recommended as exemplary by F. R. Leavis. The trouble with Leavis was that his "Yes, but" turned more and more into "No, shut up," as the only response to anyone who saw things differently than he did. By contrast Symons, while giving us nothing like Leavis's revaluative essays on major figures in English poetry, fiction, and criticism, managed to remain flexible and diverse in his critical operations in the manner recommended by Matthew Arnold. His "A Word on Late Leavis," reviewing *Anna Karenina and Other Essays*, was firm in praising the critic on Tolstoy and Samuel Johnson, but equally firm in deploring his "narrow dogmatism," "lack of charity," and "failures of imagination and sympathy." These faults are demonstrated, irrefutably to my mind, in the course of showing why what was once "passion" in Leavis had turned into "prejudice."

A similar narrowing and hardening was precisely what did *not* happen in Symons's own critical work, most of it done in the form of reviews that will doubtless never see hard covers. As for the English non-academic reviewer-critics mentioned earlier, Symons was less flamboyant, violent, and vindictive than Geoffrey Grigson; but he stayed equally away from the mildness that informed V. S. Pritchett's refusal to say anything about a writer unless it was something on the nice side.

The poet in Symons never died out and resurfaced memorably in the two years that followed the sudden death of his daughter Sarah: the poems that ensued, privately printed, were a testimony of love and pain, made just bearable by being given formal shape. Some years after that, my wife and I traveled for a few days with Julian and Kathleen Symons in the West Country of England, especially Shropshire. One day, as we meandered through a park and paused to look down at the landscape with the river winding through it, one or the other of us brought up A. E. Housman, and Julian began to quote from Housman's loveliest, most heartbreaking poem, "Tell me not here, it needs not saying":

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Possess, as I possessed a season,
The countries I resign,
Where over elmy plains the highway
Would mount the hills and shine,
And full of shade the pillared forest
Would murmur and be mine.

As a writer, Julian never resigned anything, and the last fifteen years of his life yielded ten works of fiction, among the best of which are *The Blackheath Poisonings* (1978), *The Criminal Comedy of the Contented Couple* (1985), and *Death's Darkest Face* (1990), his most complex if not most satisfactory work. *Playing Happy Families*, which appeared last year, revealed not the least loss of energy or technical inventiveness. Besides these, he brought out among other works of non-fiction, short biographies of Dashiell Hammett and Conan Doyle, a highly readable and idiosyncratic account of modernism (*Makers of the New*, 1987), and an anthology of Wyndham Lewis's writings with interspersed commentary (*The Essential Wyndham Lewis*, 1989), in which he had his last say about the old Enemy who was his precursor. All manner of awards were bestowed on him as the grandmaster of crime novelists; he traveled extensively (and enthusiastically) to address interested audiences in Sweden, Spain, Hungary, and America.

Julian, as a true man of letters, was a splendid correspondent, writing pages filled with everything from gossip and personal disclosures to large literary judgments. A letter to me in 1981 contains a first paragraph thanking me for the "hilarious" letter I had written; he said that he and Kathleen laughed not just with me but *at* me in my attempt to follow a low-sodium diet (it didn't last long) and to save a doomed soap opera, *Search for Tomorrow*, from cancellation. Further down came an account of a Faber publishing party where he encountered both Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis:

K annoyed with Amis because she said "Hallo" and he replied "Hallo" and nothing more. A failure of recognition? Not possible? Anyway while talking enthusiastically to Lark and Am, I gestured too wildly with a glass of wine and slopped some over Lark's totally white suit—he was wearing white suit and tie, had been to Lords for Test Match. He moved away—quickly without look of pleasure—but actually wrote me polite letter a day or two later saying sorry for abrupt departure.

A paragraph later brought this bit of experience with a physician:

At several sessions he has taken to expelling my warts with frozen nitrogen which he sprays at me, having first poured it from a large thermos flask into the spraying device, spilling lots of it on the floor where it smokes and sizzles. Spraying away, stop watch in hand to see he doesn't burn my skin away completely, he talks of spondees and dactyls and the benefits of a classical education. A classy lot, our English specialists. The results are good but not perfect. What's perfect however?

In the last few years, Julian endured a couple of operations, one of them successful for colon cancer. Except for some angina and a hearing loss, he seemed unimpaired when we visited him in England in the fall of 1993. But the following March brought bad news of an inoperable pancreatic malignancy. He said that a book of his crime essays was slated to appear but that he would probably abandon the novel he was halfway through. Then, having given me the bad news, he began a new paragraph by referring to a review of mine I'd sent him: "Not but what it's just about time for me to leave a world in which Pritchard—*Pritchard*—is praising Nicholson Baker and comparing him to Proust and Nabokov." He went on, vigorously, to point out that Baker's art, compared to the two masters, was "of a very different kind, a very inferior kind." Never have I been so satisfactorily chastened or moved by a spirit that, in the face of a grim verdict, could still play around with his shocked reader.

About that time, as an octogenarian he had been asked by a London magazine to answer some questions about death, such as what was his "ideal way to go." He answered, "Where should a writer die but at his desk? Ideally, after writing 'the end' to his best book with a pen—no word processor in sight." One was thus pleased to hear that the novel he'd planned to leave half-finished had been completed earlier in the fall. But the end was in sight: in a letter to a young Canadian writer who'd gotten to know and admire him, he wrote:

This will be in the way of a signing-off letter. . . . I'm now seeing the sign marked EXIT rather distinctly. . . . I live as my brother A. J. said when on the way out, from week to weak. I don't

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mind about dying, perhaps I have lived long enough. . . . If my health takes an upturn of course you'll hear from me again. If not, look out for the obituaries.

The following day he died suddenly of a heart attack, which saved him from the more drawn out rigor of death by cancer. As far as I can make out, no man or woman of letters is following in his footsteps. Who would be so rash as to try?

The Theory of Art

ROBIN SHECTMAN

All art is quite useless.—Oscar Wilde

Outside the march of progress,
it lifts you from your feet,
a burst of purposeless joy
that cures no cancer,
builds no instrument,
leads you only to yourself,
forgetting the artist,
ink, paper, paint, clay,
free of their practical callings,
like dolphins pulsing from the sea,
not to save you from drowning,
not to show you the way,
just dancing,
because the elements are there.

✪ ROBIN SHECTMAN's poems have appeared in the *Kenyon Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, and many other magazines.

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Thomas Hardy

The Poet as Philosopher

DAN JACOBSON

Hardy as philosopher? The philosophizing of Thomas Hardy? Say the words out loud or write them down—and a series of other words and phrases follows inexorably. Pessimism. Gloom. Melancholy. Fate. Meaninglessness. The impossibility of faith. The mysterious workings of chance. The malignity of coincidence. Tragedy. Morbidity. Decadence. (That last term is T. S. Eliot's contribution, in *After Strange Gods,* to the critical lexicon.) Sooner or later Edmund Gosse's famous put-down is also bound to come to mind: "What has Providence done to Mr. Hardy that he should rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his Creator?"

Even readers devoted to Hardy's work will know why it provokes responses of this kind. Angel Clare's woebegone parody of Browning—"God's *not* in his heaven: all's *wrong* with the world"—may be dramatically appropriate to his character and to the critical moment in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* at which he utters it. But we can hardly doubt that Clare is speaking there not just for himself but for his creator too; that he is expressing an attitude, an emotion, a belief, even a kind of proselytizing impulse, that is found almost everywhere in the oeuvre. There is something damagingly recognizable in the half-conscious *enthusiasm* of Clare's reflection—in the relish, at once minatory and faintly comic, with which it enunciates its own despair.

In any case, Hardy frequently expresses similar sentiments in both the novels and the poems without making any attempt to "mediate" them through the consciousness of a fictional character. The final, famous comment on the execution of the heroine of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess"—is a case in point. So is the passing reference in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* to "the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum." (Offered as an explanation, almost as throttling as the noose looped around Tess's neck, of why Henchard will make no further effort to resist the successive blows that life, or the novelist, has dealt against him.) Or to take almost at random an example from the poems:

> But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain
> And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
> —Crass casualty obstructs the sun and rain
> And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
> These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
> Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.
>
> —"Hap"
>
> (The ellipsis in the passage is Hardy's own.)

The persistence of these attitudes, emotional prepossessions, and habits of mind—and the depth at which they were held—certainly entitles them to the dignity of being described as "a reaction to the universe." That was a phrase that John Middleton Murry coined in trying to explain why each of Hardy's works affects us as part of "a vaster and more comprehensive whole." Although he was writing at that point about the poetry, Murry was convinced that the verse and the fiction were essentially of a piece; and, on the face of it, there is enough misery, regret, chagrin, and wistfulness in both bodies of writing, as well as a sufficient supply of wretched coincidences

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and unhappy endings, to justify this view. Nevertheless, I want to argue that some of the poems, at least, have an additional quality that is peculiar to them alone. Hardy's overall "reaction to the universe" is certainly discernible in them. But so is something else. In mode and intention, these poems manage to be genuinely philosophical as well.

Traditionally the philosopher's task has been that of trying to develop articulate, settled systems of thought about the nature of the world, about the moral constitution of mankind, and about the grounds and modalities of knowledge itself. Traditionally, too, it was expected that the arguments advanced by a thinker within any one of these areas of inquiry would be coherent not just with themselves, as it were, but also with those put forward in the other two, regardless of the differences in emphasis between them.

Obviously no such system, or interlocking set of systems, is to be found in Hardy's poems. So what justification is there for the claim I have just made about them, or some of them? For an answer, I turn first to Schopenhauer—a grand philosophical system builder in the traditional manner, who, as it happens, used to be held in special esteem by literary people, among them Tolstoy and Hardy himself. "The philosophical disposition," Schopenhauer wrote, "consists especially in our being capable of wondering at a commonplace thing of daily occurrence, whereby we are induced to make the *universal* [i.e., the entire class] of that phenomenon our problem." (Italics in the original.)

In starker (or more Hardyesque) terms, Schopenhauer goes on:

> Undoubtedly it is the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life that give the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world. If our life were without end and free from pain, it would possibly not occur to anyone to ask why the world exists, and why it does so in precisely this way.

And again:

> Not merely that the world exists, but still more that it is such a miserable and melancholy world, is the *punctum pruriens* [tormenting problem] of metaphysics.

For the mass of people, Schopenhauer then suggests, the "wonder" and "torment" of which he speaks can be allayed only by religious belief and practice. For a much smaller, more reflective number, however, nothing will suffice but the development of, or an adherence to, a metaphysical system of the kind he himself had already developed when he wrote the above words. (The quotations have been taken from volume 2, chapter 7, of *The World as Will and Representation.*) Nothing else had the power to free them from their "perplexity," as he puts it on another page, about the world in which they find themselves. We have, on the one hand, therefore, the majority who have to rely on religious dogma and ritual, and, on the other hand, philosophers and their followers. And the rest of us? I mean those people who experience something of the wonder and the torment Schopenhauer has described, who reject the consolations of religious belief, and yet who lack the capacity or the appetite for sustained, abstract argumentation with themselves and their peers that is necessary for the creation, or the sympathetic comprehension, or the critical destruction, indeed, of a fully fledged metaphysical system. What are they to do? How are they to cope?

Well, they can always fall back on their habitual reaction to the universe, whatever that may be—as Hardy often did in his novels and poems; and as most of us do, in quasi-automatic fashion, both at times of crisis and in states of mere reverie. In other poems, however, we find Hardy doing something else, something more surprising. It is as if the brevity of the poetic forms he customarily adopted, the concentration it permitted on single episodes and single issues—rather than on entire lives or groups of lives—enabled him to go back to the original condition from which Schopenhauer insists all philosophical thought springs; and not only to go back to it but, remarkably enough, *to remain there.*

I quote Schopenhauer's words again: "The philosophical disposition consists especially in our being capable of wondering at a commonplace thing of daily occurrence, whereby we are induced to make the *universal* [the entire class] of that phenomenon our problem." Surely that sentence can in itself be thought of as an accurate and even touching description of the movement of mind and emotion

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we find over and over again in the most impressive of Hardy's poems.

Hardy wrote verse from his adolescence onward, though he began bringing out his poems only after his last-published, though not his last-written, novel, *The Well-Beloved*, had appeared in 1897. In the remaining twenty years of his life, he published nine more volumes of poetry, his final collection, *Winter Words*, coming out posthumously in 1929. He also wrote a verse-drama on the Napoleonic Wars, *The Dynasts*, which appeared in three parts between 1904 and 1908. His decision to abandon fiction and confine himself to verse owed something to the hostile reception given to *Jude the Obscure*, on the grounds of the novel's supposed obscenity; but the biographical and literary evidence shows that poetry was anything but a pis aller for him. Rather, it could be called his earliest as well as his last calling.

Anyone looking into an edition of the collected poems for the first time might be struck by two apparently contradictory features of the large volume. The first is the uniformity of Hardy's poetry; the second is its variety. By *uniformity* I mean that it is impossible to trace any kind of development, any growth or decline in power, any change in subject matter, technique, or even emotional tone, from the beginning to the end of his poetic career. No doubt this is in part due to the fact that he had been accumulating poems or drafts of poems for so long before appearing in public as a poet; these were then drawn in irregular fashion into his successive books. The result is that the felicities of his verse are found as frequently in the first collection as in the last; so are the lapses into awkwardness and bathos to which he was always prone; so are those turns of phrase and rhyme that somehow combine the felicitous and the awkward in a manner unlike anything to be found elsewhere in English poetry.

There are of course sequences of poems that plainly belong to one or another specific period of Hardy's life—those he wrote during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), for example; or, even more notably, those written after Emma Hardy's death in 1912, which celebrate and mourn the brief period of happiness he and she had known together, as well as the decades of conjugal misery that followed. (Readers of the available accounts of Hardy's life are likely to feel that they can hardly imagine a more unhappy marriage than his to Emma. Then they go on to learn about his second marriage, to Florence.) However, groups of poems like those just mentioned do not differ in style or vocabulary from the rest of his output; they appear intermixed with others that could have been produced at any time during his adult life; even the themes, moods, and preoccupations that they explore with their own special intensity are familiar from other contexts and in other guises.

So much for what I have called the "uniformity" of the verse. As for its "variety," he wrote hundreds of dramatic, descriptive, and meditative poems of all kinds, lyrics, love songs, ballads, sonnets, drinking songs, character sketches, poems on public issues and events (the sinking of the *Titanic*, the outbreak or the ending of wars, an eclipse of the moon), tributes to other poets (Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Swinburne), as well as poems that combine these genres, or elements of them, inunexpected ways. The verse forms, rhythms, and rhyme schemes he used vary from poem to poem in what seems to be a positively compulsive manner. No particular form is matched consistently to any particular genre or type of subject matter. (Blank verse, however, appears only in *The Dynasts*; all of Hardy's other poetry is rhymed.) To complicate matters still further, he will frequently begin a poem in one elaborate stanzaic form, frequently a form newly invented for the occasion, only to switch to another halfway through; sometimes he will then return to the original form before the end of the poem, sometimes not.

The effect of all this is bound to be, intermittently at least, one of "toomuchness." The formal restlessness of the poet, and the ingenuities of rhyme and syntax into which it frequently drives him, can make an almost childlike impression at times. Nor is it unfair to call childlike some of the delight that Hardy takes in his dramatic and narrative verse especially, in melodramatic coincidences very much like those to be found in the novels, or in a sepulchral spookiness, also reminiscent of much to be found in the prose. However, the word "childlike" can be used with a more interesting and honorific purpose in mind—one that has a direct relevance to the claims I am making here.

I refer once again, and for the last time, to Schopenhauer's "wonder" at "a commonplace

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thing of daily occurrence" and at the human capacity to make "the *universal* of that phenomenon our problem." Consider "Proud Songsters":

> The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
> And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
> And as it gets dark loud nightingales
> In bushes
> Pipe, as they can when April wears,
> As if all time were theirs.
>
> These are brand-new birds of twelve-
> months' growing,
> Which, a year ago, or less than twain,
> No finches were, nor nightingales,
> Nor thrushes,
> But only particles of grain,
> And earth, and air, and rain.

The "commonplace" here is the annual din of birdsong that rises to the ears even of city dwellers every spring. To define the "entire class" of the phenomenon that has become "our problem" is a more difficult matter. We can come closest to it, I believe, by way of a question—a childlike question, if you like. Where were we, what were we before we came into existence? ("We," here, refers to all living things.) Alternatively that question could be put in terms more abstract or general still: one might say that the poem speaks of the baffling incommensurability between life (with all its movement and purposes) and the insentient matter out of which it emerges, by which it is surrounded, and to which it eventually returns. However, a complementary and more familiar question in this context is bound to be suggested by my last phrase; Shakespeare's Hamlet, among many others, was famously tormented by it. What becomes of us, what transformations does the material of which we are composed undergo after our death? And what do such transformations tell us about the sense of individual selfhood that we prize so highly while we possess it—or are possessed by it? Not surprisingly, Hardy deals more often in his poems with the question in this form than he does with the startling inversion of it—the unique inversion of it, so far as I know—presented in "Proud Songsters."

Moving as they constantly do from the commonplace occurrence to the general case, and back again, many of Hardy's poems grapple with a variety of other childlike questions of this kind. What is it like to be dead? What is it like never to have lived? How much of the dead lives in us and how does it show itself? Why is it, or how is it, that I can become aware of this rock or leaf or table when it knows nothing of me? How is it that I can retrace my steps in space and can never go back in time? Or is it actually easier for me to retrace my steps in time because of the memories I carry with me; whereas the person who originally walked this way has already vanished, since (being here) I am no longer what he was? Why can I see so far ahead of me in space and not even an hour ahead of me in time? Where does time go when it has passed, or when we have passed through it? Why is there so much of it on either side of our meager life spans? And so much space around the little area each of us occupies? Are memories real? If so, why are they so impalpable? If not, why do they affect us so deeply? What becomes of them when the person who possessed them has died? How do we arrive at the limits of our knowledge, and how do we recognize those limits when we get there? What does that act of recognition feel like? What is it like to be a cow, or a hedgehog? Or creatures humbler still?

An August Midnight

I

> A shaded lamp, and a waving blind,
> And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
> On this scene enter—winged, horned, and
> spined—
> A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;
> While 'mid my page there idly stands
> A sleepy fly that rubs its hands . . .

II

> Thus meet we five, in this still place,
> At this point of time, at this point of space.
> —My guests besmear my new-penned line,
> Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
> "God's humblest, they!" I muse. Yet why?
> They know earth-secrets that know not I.

No doubt the idea of a fly or a moth knowing "earth-secrets" that a human cannot know may seem merely whimsical to some readers; just as the questions asked previously may appear too simple for serious grown-ups to bother with. Still, on the subject of the moths and flies, it was Wittgenstein (usually consid-

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ered to have been a deeply serious grown-up) who remarked in *The Philosophical Investigations,* "If a lion could speak, we would not be able to understand it." And as for the childishness of the questions asked earlier—or their pointlessness, as some down-to-earth or ruthlessly positivistic readers may feel them to be—it was Wittgenstein, again, who said (in the *Tractatus*): "In order to put a limit to thinking, we have to think on both sides of the limit."

That is precisely what Hardy is trying to do in the two poems I have quoted and in many others that are both like them and yet, always, fluctuatingly different. Because of the intimate terms in which the problems are posed and the homely contexts in which he seeks to find answers to them, the intellectual sophistication of what is at stake has gone unnoticed—as indeed has the quasi-instinctive movement of his mind away from the "architectural" ambitions of the philosophers of the nineteenth century to the piecemeal linguistic worryings of their successors. (From Schopenhauer to Wittgenstein, as it were.)

One of the central issues that Hardy addresses again and again is this: How is it that we can conceive, talk about, and even base our calculations on aspects of the universe that, by their very nature, defeat both our understanding and our imagination? The expanses of geological or cosmological time ("At Castle Boterel") might be cited here; or the expanses of astronomical space ("At a Lunar Eclipse"); or, for that matter, the large, undifferentiated oppositions—life and death, matter and creatureliness, knowledge and nescience—that manifest themselves in such different forms wherever we look. (Notice the care with which in "Proud Songsters" Hardy distinguishes by sound and habitat between the various species of bird he mentions. Once nothing more than "particles," they now "sing" or "whistle" or "pipe" as each in its kind has immemorially done; they hide in bushes or show themselves in ones and twos as their respective natures compel them.) He reaches outward to ask whether our capacity to conceive and talk about that which we cannot understand or imagine should be considered a failure of the human mind—or its greatest triumph. And he reaches inward to ask how the different modes of awareness and ignorance to which we are committed, from which we cannot escape, affect our most intimate apprehensions of our individual lives. Why, for example, are we so prone to valuing in retrospect that which we barely noticed when it was present in its fullness and presentness before us? Or can it be that, because of some other, inexpressible failure in our capacities, fullness and presentness belong exclusively to retrospect and never to the unmediated, extempore event itself?

All this may help us to understand better one of the most striking stylistic features of Hardy's poems: a feature, moreover, that is often dismissed as a sign of the poet's naïveté (not to say childishness), his simplicity of mind, his rurality, his failure fully to recover from his provincial, lower-class upbringing. I refer to the extraordinary number of neologisms to be found in the verse. Anyone who opens the collected poems at random and goes through a handful of pages in cursory fashion will come on a host of these. My own trawl of three or four minutes' duration produced the following: fellow-yearsman, wistlessness, crumb-outcaster, outleant, fervorless, river-ooze, God-obeyer, unhope, circleted, The To-Be, unvisioned, ill-motherings, corpse-thing, forthshown, edgewise, Time-outrun, time-torn.

Several things are noticeable about this list, which obviously could be replaced with equal ease by an entirely different one—and so on, almost indefinitely. First, many of the words are compounds; second, many of them are negative, not to say gloomy, compounds; third, such words are relatively rarely found in Hardy's novels. (Dialect terms are another matter.) The first two observations are perhaps self-explanatory. The English language lends itself more readily to the invention of compounds than to that of wholly new terms; and Hardy's temperament—his reaction to the universe—for the most part encouraged him to construct gloomy ones. But something much more important is involved here. In the poems I am speaking of, Hardy was working at the very limits of the thinkable—of that which it is possible for our brains to encompass. In order to do this, he was also compelled to work at the very limits of the language—of that which it is possible for us to say. Hence the necessity he felt constantly to invent new words.

As readers we witness his attempts to create a language that would enable him to say not only everything he wanted to say, but also, more remarkably still, everything he knew he would never be able to say.

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Remembering E. J. Kahn, Jr.

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

On May 28, 1994, E. J. Kahn, Jr., died in the Holyoke Hospital in Holyoke, Massachusetts. He had been mortally injured in an automobile accident involving a collision between the car he was riding in and a truck. When I read about it, it seemed like a most unlikely way for Jack Kahn—he was known to everyone as Jack, E. J. stood for Ely Jacques—to have died. In the last few years, Jack, whom I had known since the early 1960s, had survived both very serious heart problems and a serious bout with cancer. He had also survived several wars, to say nothing of travel to places that would have made most normal people's hair stand on end. He had begun writing for *The New Yorker* in 1937, while he was still a student at Harvard. He was one of *The New Yorker*'s war correspondents in the Second World War, in which he had served as a chief warrant officer in the South Pacific. When the Korean War broke out, he covered that war, too, for the magazine.

When I joined the staff of *The New Yorker* in 1963, Jack was one of the first people I met. Typically , it was not at the offices of the magazine, where I seldom went, but on Jamaica, where he had gone with his family to play tennis. Jack was a dogged, tough doubles player—more Scottish terrier than greyhound. A short man with the kind of wrinkled-up face that looks as if its owner is about to have a good laugh, he made fun of people in a gentle way. He made fun of me. I got into his book *About The New Yorker and Me* because one afternoon on the beach in Jamaica I had met a beautiful Creole girl and showed up with her at a party he was attending. He never let me forget it. I guess that is how he thought I lived. I never saw her again after that evening, but she is immortalized in Jack's book.

Jack was one of the last of the dying breed of *New Yorker* writers, artists, and editorial staff who had served under all four of the magazine's editors. He had begun under Harold Ross, but really thrived under William Shawn. In Jack's book about *The New Yorker*, Shawn is like Godot, present and absent on every page. To someone who did not experience it, writing for William Shawn may seem a myth, like looking for Big Foot. To understand it, you must keep in mind that Shawn controlled our destinies. He determined what we were paid, where we traveled, what we wrote. It worked much of the time because most of us believed that Shawn was a genius and because we believed that, at base, he was fair. I think that is what Jack believed, though at times Shawn infuriated him. He infuriated all of us. I remember once meeting Jack and his saying over and over again, "This time Shawn has gone too far." It was never clear to me what exactly Shawn had done or what, if anything, Jack planned to do about it. Jack was one of the few *New Yorker* writers to call Shawn "Bill" instead of "Mr. Shawn," as I did. I am quite sure that this familiarity did not make the slightest difference in what Shawn thought of a piece of writing—or in whether he accepted or rejected it.

When I first knew him, I had the impression that Jack drank a good deal, as did many of the writers and artists of his generation. It didn't seem to affect his work or his demeanor. Jack must have inherited some money. His father was a noted architect and Jack had gone to a pretty fancy private school in New York before Harvard. He lived with his

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second wife, the writer and art critic Eleanor Munro Frankfurter, in a Park Avenue apartment that had at least two floors. At least that is the number I saw when I went to parties at their place. They gave wonderful parties. You met all the writers that you had ever heard of. I went to Jack's sixtieth birthday party eighteen years ago. Shawn was there. He eyed me strangely. At one point he came over and asked what I was doing there, adding that he was interested in "connections." He had me pegged as someone who barely emerged from the physics laboratory. I explained about Jamaica. He seemed satisfied. It was a connection.

Like many of the rest of us, Jack fared less well under Robert Gottlieb, *The New Yorker*'s third editor. I think he felt, as I did, that Gottlieb was a decent man, but erratic. Furthermore, Jack had taken what I thought was a bum rap over a series of articles about grains: wheat, corn, and the like. They were always cited by people, who probably hadn't read them, as being what was "wrong" with *The New Yorker*. In fact, each one of them was a brilliant essay filled with the unlikely history of these grains. Shawn strung out their publication over a year and they ended up as a book titled *Staffs of Life*.

There may have been things wrong with *The New Yorker* but they weren't Jack's articles. Gottlieb was always bad-mouthing one writer to another—not a good trait in an editor. When Tina Brown, *The New Yorker*'s present editor, took over, she floated the myth that she was returning the magazine to what it had been in the thirties. It is reported, reliably, that before becoming its editor she had never read the magazine. She is said to have locked herself in a room with a box of *New Yorkers* in an attempt to absorb the essence. She reacted by firing a great many of the artists and writers who had made their careers under Shawn. She did not fire Jack, but she didn't publish him either. The last time I saw Jack, we both rolled our eyes at what the magazine had become. Now, a year later, one averts one's eyes.

It is sometimes said that the careers of teachers are written on water. Not much remains except in the students they have influenced. The careers of magazine writers seem similarly evanescent. I am sure that I could produce a list of twenty *New Yorker* writers who had a close following in their day but who are now almost totally forgotten. I don't think Jack expected immortality. For more than fifty years his writing gave pleasure and enlightenment to the readers of a great magazine. That's saying a lot.

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Bagels on Sunday

DAVID A. MOROWITZ

One pleasant ritual of my relatively uncomplicated life is the Sunday morning purchase of freshly baked bagels, a happy task repeated with undiminished delight. And why not? The bagels are wonderful, and the bakery is filled with an animated friendly crowd in lines growing out the door onto the sidewalk. Children perched on their father's shoulders are gnawing their small, moistened samples; everyone is smiling. The morning's hunger is forgotten briefly, and the relaxed weekend decisions are about matters of poppy seeds, onion, garlic, and sesame.

Personifying an earlier, gentler Brooklyn, the baker stuffs a bag with my breakfast, but he dispenses more than his fragrant, chewy circles. Like an archangel weighing souls, he seems to know us all, selling, alongside his food, some of the evidence of our lives he quietly accrues. To him, the customer busily choosing three dozen bagels is likely to host a brunch; the more sedate patron ordering only two or three will probably return to an empty house and a table for one. Some of his former couples now shop separately. A few pay with hundred dollar bills, others with coins.

But the cash register's musical staccato dismisses melancholy. For here are commerce, good smells, suburban cheerfulness, and health, mixed among kids, the young, the very old, and the in-betweens. Owing to the uniform excellence of what is baked here, most of us are regulars. The eight o'clock crowd reconvenes punctually, as do the late risers, both with a light-hearted sense of anticipatory pleasure. And as the angst of late Sunday and the Monday to come have not yet descended, conversations are about car pools, home remodeling, vacations, and colleges. Warm, bagged bagels under their arms, the exiting customers smile at the rest of us, affirming the worth of the wait.

But like a slowly expanding dark spot in the shaving mirror I face each morning is the sense, occurring more frequently with age, of how fragile are the good fortunes of all of us in that particular time and place. Waiting in turn, I find myself wondering which of us will be the first absentee on some future Sunday, sensing also the miracle of our weekend reunions. Everybody here seems to have enough money, gets into a car that works, is not short of breath from the walk into the bakery, and exhibits neither pain nor anxiety that might require an analgesic or a tranquilizer. For all of us here at the bakery have managed to avoid or survive life's historical, medical, or psychiatric catastrophes and, in doing so, seem blissfully forgetful of how closely we approach them each day.

While not part of the turbulence in a happy shop on Sunday, the tragic possibilities may be just offstage, imaginable as the tiny margins by which we escape them. Leave your driveway onto the street a bit too early, and you will be crushed by a speeding truck; a first morning's urine is combined with blood, and your life's closure is made visible in a toilet bowl. Or perhaps, it's a phone call that finds you at four in the morning and begins with the words, "This is Officer. . . ."

For all of us buyers of bagels, seemingly numbed by the noisy happiness, that day hasn't yet come. Our coughs have all managed to disappear; the reassuring sound of regular breath only inches away still warms

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our awakenings. Unexplained weight loss reverses, and the bad news, seeming to come out of nowhere, goes to someone else. We haven't yet lost in life's reverse lottery.

Life, companionship, health, solvency: these are gifts none of us fully understands. But shouldn't we at least sense the wondrousness of the luck involved? A half-second of travel may be all that separates a safe arrival from death in traffic. An extra millimeter in a coronary artery's size defers a heart attack for forty years. But for some antique good fortune, we suburbanites, awaiting our baked goods, might have been placed into an earlier line at Treblinka. We are blessed, but only for now.

Like an unwelcome, persistent insect, the thought of it may be brushed repeatedly from our consciousness, but the Sunday will come when we can't operate a car, count our change, or sense the simple, almost mindless prospect of starting coffee and separating out the sections of the morning paper. The short trip for our bagels ought to be seasoned with gratitude: for each future errand, for the life and health they represent, and for our nonchalance in forgetting temporarily that this cannot last, not even an act so small and perfect as going for bagels on Sunday.

I want to say to the fathers with kids on their shoulders, to the housewives returning to their station wagons, to all those wearers of designer jeans, to please look hard—drink in the beauty of the commonplace. Know your immense good fortune. We skate on ice whose thinness we never fully appreciate until our ankles chill as we crash through it. The bagel encircles the thin middle of our hourglass.

On these happy Sunday mornings I wonder what my children will look like when their hair, which I will not live to see, turns white. To know its impermanence can only make us love this life more. Going for bagels on Sunday is fate's temporary indulgence, the exultation of the ordinary.

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Angels of Sunlight

MICHAEL S. GLASER

As I read Zen in the morning,
my young daughter leaves her bed
and lies next to me on the sofa
where sunlight angles through the window.

In half-sleep, her brown eyes
stare off at the large oak
unleaving in front of the house.

I cup her head in the palm of my hand,
feel the chambers of my heart fill and empty,
fill and empty like the sunlight warming
this room like the words on the page fill

my spirit like the air in her purple balloon
like the breath of her lungs as her chest
rises and falls like the leaves on that tree
dancing in the wind and knowing

as they know,
something important
about attachment,
about letting go.

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Lafcadio

DAVID RAY

He loved seeing people out of Hokusai—
their straw raincoats, their hats
big as umbrellas—
those who tottered about on their *getas*
over quaint footbridges,
mountain always in the distance—
those who stooped to the lowliest chore.

And how they made their way
through the snow or rain slant
as in the woodcuts—
he loved that too, and the snow on Fuji.

And then, though he was the alien, the stared-
upon outsider, love came to him blooming—
so ripe and incense-laden, so glowing
within that paper house—that he said
she was golden, the flame
of her love shining through, lambent,
sure to burn on after him. "Gleams
of gilding," he said
of this light, her brightness fighting back
his shadows, the gloom he had brought
across oceans.

Perhaps he had earned this—a brief time
with her, a clearing, he said,
in his difficult life.

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And like a child he wanted to know
of the Buddhists
why they clapped their hands
three times in the scented, buttery light
before they prayed.

And the answer delighted him—

"To wake from the dream
this life too often has been
before prayer!"

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"Remember That I Have Remembered"

KONIN: A QUEST. *By Theo Richmond. Pantheon. $27.50.*
THE BUCHENWALD REPORT. *Translated and edited by David A. Hackett. Westview Press. $35.*

MICHAEL ANDRÉ BERNSTEIN

The past is a foreign country in which Jews have always been enjoined to feel at home. *Zakhar*, the verb "to remember," has been central to Jewish thought and self-definition from the beginning, occurring, so experts have tabulated, in one form or another at least one hundred and sixty-nine times in the Hebrew Bible. Memory itself, in the memorable biblical phrase, must be transmitted without adulteration, *ledor vador*, "from generation to generation." In the introduction to his deeply absorbing book, *Konin: A Quest*, Theo Richmond, the British documentary filmmaker, ponders these words, and concludes that the survival of a distinct Jewish identity has depended primarily upon the internalization of this biblical imperative. Forgetting is another, more permanent, form of exile, a banishment not merely from one's land, but from who one fundamentally is. "I remember, therefore I am," is how Richmond would recast Descartes, grounding his very being in those dimensions of temporal and narrative depth that the philosopher tried to exclude altogether from credible self-reflection.

I emphasize narrative alongside temporal continuity, because at the heart of what must be transmitted and recalled is a body of stories. For a long time now, it has been through fidelity to a shared and ever-expanding corpus of tales and chronicles, not just to any specific religious practices, and still less to any single, authoritative interpretation of those practices, that Jews continue to constitute their communal indentity. And because the responsibility for absorbing, interpreting, and then handing on those narratives marks each new generation, Jews are simultaneously story dwellers and storytellers. They become who they are by identifying with experiences they have never known firsthand but nonetheless have come to regard as their own. What is inherited is neither a theology nor even a worldview, but something like the tale of the tribe: a skein of exemplary stories and characters the imagination can draw upon to nourish a powerful sense of continuity with the past as well as kinship with others raised on the same tales.

But if this is so, then modern culture as a whole begins to have a decidedly Jewish look. Or, to put the matter less provocatively, Jewish thought has always regarded as foundational the linkage of memory, narrative, and identity that has become one of the most widespread preoccupations of our time. Beginning in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the Western imagination has become increasingly obsessed with the problematic nature of memory, until remembrance itself became regarded as the ultimate site of ideological contestation. Nietzsche's rearguard polemic against the dominance of memory, especially of historical memory, in governing our lives shows how relatively recent the phenomenon is.

Yet today, especially after the Shoah, the

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kind of forgetting that Nietzsche sometimes urged has become too compromised to have any but the most dubious advocates. It is no longer possible to regard forgetting as a form of innocence, as the guarantor of aristocratic immediacy and freedom from *ressentiment* about which Nietzsche dreamt, because we have seen genocidal terror try to consign a whole people to being forgotten, their every trace ordered obliterated from the earth and from history. When identity is so brutally questioned and its right to exist so categorically denied, then the reasons for that identity, and the grounds for maintaining it, become all-important. The death camps changed remembering itself, and not merely for Jews. Genocide is now, in Hannah Arendt's chilling formulation, part of the "repertoire of power" we all inhabit, and that realization alone has charged remembrance with a fierce intensity and given it a new ethical dimension. Jews persevered throughout history by making remembering simultaneously a sacred and a social obligation. As numerous different cultures and ways of life have found themselves threatened with extinction on a global scale, the Hebrew Bible's admonitions against forgetting have come to seem as though they were not addressed to any one people, but rather to our whole epoch's collective anxieties.

If forgetting now strikes us as an intolerable surrender to injustice, remembering, too, is neither impartial nor transparent. Many recent studies have emphasized the politically and ideologically motivated categories that remembrance serves and by which it is, in the current critical jargon, "constructed." At least on American campuses, it sometimes seems that memory has become the latest academic growth industry, and there is a relentless drive to classify memory according to the latest theoretical typologies (postmodernist memory, modernist memory, romantic memory, etc.). But cultural and ethnic recollection often harbors other more subtle dangers that are independent of the specific motivation of those engaged in remembering their heritage.

Simply put, the danger arises when memory itself obliterates differences. Because remembering is necessarily selective, it organizes its images and incidents around the supposedly "typical" and "representative," thereby both leveling the past and portraying it with an altogether unwarranted degree of uniformity and coherence. An unacknowledged presumption of homogeneity and consensus structures most accounts of the past (and most projections into the future) because it is primarily in the present that we have an admitted stake in registering and responding to differences. Paradoxically, it is the past and future that we tend to see in a bright and uniform light; shadows and gray zones are too often limited to representations of the present, where it is much easier to picture the multiple alternatives that arise from every situation and the diversity of characteristics that mark any community. As numerous accounts of European Jewry in the pre-Nazi years show, when a culture has been savagely wiped out, it is often remembered later as having been still more homogenous than if it had ceased existing simply with the passage of time.

Such leveling is itself a kind of violation. Unintentionally, it duplicates the perspective of the murderers for whom their victims were an undifferentiated mass of bodies to be disposed of. The attempt at genocide presumes that the group singled out for extermination actually has a single identity, and Nazi policy in the ghettos and camps was specifically designed to create that group identity through terror, hunger, and exhaustion as a preliminary stage in the process of extermination. To remember the victims without capitulating to their dehumanization, it is crucial to particularize their existence before they ever became victims and to preserve as much as possible of the individual voices and projects that the Shoah blotted out.

Recently, two books have appeared that highlight these issues with admirable lucidity. To consider within a single horizon a collective text such as *The Buchenwald Report* and a deeply personal one such as Theo Richmond's *Konin: A Quest* is particularly illuminating because, despite their differences in theme, scope, and composition, these two works provide what amounts to a systematic lesson in how to allow a multiplicity of voices to emerge without slighting either their individuality or their participation in a communal catastrophe. Even when, as in *The Buchenwald Report*, the aim is to chronicle the shared experiences of captives forced to endure hitherto unimaginable horrors, the individuality of the prisoners is never forgotten. Daily, unrelieved, and systematic debasement did not succeed in

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making the survivor-witnesses of *The Buchenwald Report* describe themselves in terms of a monolithic category, and the report is as scrupulous in recording the differences—psychological, ideological, temperamental—among the camp inmates as it is in chronicling the variety of hellish tortures to which they were subjected.

On April 11, 1945, when the U.S. Army liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp five miles north of Weimar, it was the first time the Western Allies had come across a camp that still had a significant contingent of living prisoners (approximately 21,000), as well as fully intact crematoriums, execution rooms, and "hospital" facilities used for "medical experiments" on the inmates. Two days later, Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton visited Buchenwald, and their revulsion at what they saw convinced them to publicize the atrocities to the entire world. Journalists, photographers, British and American legislators, and prominent public figures were invited to Buchenwald to witness for themselves what the Nazis had done, and the U.S. Army Psychological Warfare Division ordered a report compiled of "the inner workings of Buchenwald and, by extension, of the entire Nazi concentration camp system."

The report was unique because it was the only one based on extensive interviews with prisoners while they were still in the camp. It was written primarily by a team of ten ex-prisoners headed by Eugen Kogon, a forty-two-year-old conservative Austrian Catholic with a doctorate in economics and considerable experience as both a journalist and administrator. Kogon had been in Buchenwald since September 1939, and he was assisted by four Germans, two Austrians, and one investigator each from France, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, and Latvia. Although it was initially intended to serve as evidence in the war crimes tribunals, only a few parts of the report were ever submitted, and the text itself soon disappeared from view. Kogon himself drew upon it heavily in his groundbreaking 1946 study, *Der SS-Staat* (translated in 1950 as *The Theory and Practice of Hell*), but when his copy of the report was accidentally destroyed, no other typescripts could be located, and it was presumed permanently lost.

In 1983, however, a single, yellowed carbon copy of the complete document came to light. It belonged to Albert G. Rosenberg, the U.S. Army officer who commanded the intelligence team responsible for interviewing the prisoners, and the story of the text's decipherment and translation by the historian David A. Hackett is itself a fascinating chronicle of scholarly ingenuity and persistence. More important, when *The Buchenwald Report* was finally published in its entirety, almost exactly fifty years after the liberation of the camp, it restored an invaluable archive to our understanding of the Shoah.

The Buchenwald Report is divided into two main parts, the first and shorter of which synthesizes information gathered from prisoners and the camp's own files into a single narrative. Considering that the whole report was prepared in approximately three weeks, this analytic and descriptive section is remarkable for its cogency, thoroughness, and readability. But the real marvel of the report is undoubtedly its second section, made up of first-person accounts by one hundred and four ex-prisoners. Long before the term was coined, Kogon and his team created an unprecedented example of "oral history" at its most moving.

We hear every category of Buchenwald's inmate population—including Jews, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Communists, Catholic anti-Nazis, and homosexuals—describe in their own words what they had endured. Amidst the daily, indeed hourly, infliction of sadistic torments, literally murderous work assignments, and random, brutal killings, we also find out about such less-often documented aspects as the prisoners' illicit political organization (in Buchenwald largely run by the Communists), and their pride in whatever acts of sabotage against the camp system and German war effort they could perpetrate.

Astonishingly, whenever possible the tone of the reports is deliberately cast in the active voice. Such sentences as "We were able to create a certain counterweight against the murder methods of the S.S. doctors—which of course we could not alter—by taking numerous prisoners off the transport lists" make clear a degree of prisoner solidarity at Buchenwald about which not enough has been written in subsequent studies. Even at the lexical level, the repeated use of such words as *solidarity*, *corruption*, and *prisoners' leadership* show a palpable effort to maintain the catego-

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ries of judgment and interpretation the survivors had used before entering the camp. While leaving no doubt about the likelihood of a ghastly death, the prisoners made a point of emphasizing those areas in which some possibility for a personal decision, some sense of choice, no matter how desperately narrow its field, still remained to them (for example: "In the fall of 1941 the first 2,000 Soviet prisoners of war came to Buchenwald. The entire camp did not get anything to eat for a day because we had welcomed them as our friends"). The ex-inmates speak as witnesses and victims, but not passively so; instead, they report what happened to them with a precision that is horrifying in what it records but exemplary in its acuity and insistence on moral distinctions and individual responsibility. Collectively, their voices show that, contrary to the claims of some recent writers on the Shoah, concentration camp prisoners consciously struggled to maintain a sense of personal, ethical, and psychological continuity with their pre-war selves and values.

No doubt because the testimonies were taken down right away, the reports are often cruelly, but necessarily, vivid and tangible—*The Buchenwald Report* is a document of sensations as well as of emotions and reflective understanding. And although the fifty years since it was compiled have enormously increased our knowledge of the infernal universe of the concentration camp system and given us an indispensable body of first-person accounts by survivors of the Shoah, the comprehensiveness, immediacy, and multiplicity of perspectives recorded in this book endow it with an immense authority. One of Paul Celan's bitterest poems ends with the cry: "No one / bears witness / for the witness." All those who helped to restore *The Buchenwald Report* to the communal memory have done more than "bear witness" for the witnesses: they have allowed the witnesses to do so for themselves.

If it is crucial not to permit the horrors chronicled in *The Buchenwald Report* to fade from our collective memory, it is equally important that the Shoah not dictate the ways we understand European-Jewish life before the Third Reich. The individual testimonies in the report are strikingly free of complicity with the dispiriting cliché that the entirety of Jewish existence is little more than a wrenching from horror to horror. It is exactly against the "lachrymose view of Jewish history" as only a *Jammergeschichte*, an endless tale of woe, that the best volumes of modern Jewish historical and cultural studies have been written. What is at issue here, not only for Jews, but for anyone whose heritage has been brutally obliterated, is the ability to respond to and come to terms with their past without either shame at its vulnerability or sentimentalizing nostalgia of its remembered features. This is precisely the problem confronted by Theo Richmond's *Konin*, and much of the book's success is owing to the author's careful avoidance of these pitfalls in his attempt to piece together the life of one particular pre-Nazi Polish-Jewish community.

Konin is an engagingly idiosyncratic combination of archival and human quest. It distills an obsessive, seven-year search for stories, maps, and architectural records, as well as for survivors from the town of Konin's Jewish population, and each detail rings true because it is registered as important in itself without constantly being related to larger historical currents. In 1939, Konin itself was a smallish country town in Poland, close to the German border, with about 12,000 inhabitants, of whom some 2,700 were Jews. A wooden bridge spanned the river Warta that flowed through Konin, and the beauty of the surrounding meadows and forests is still recalled with deep affection even by the Shoah survivors Richmond interviewed in Israel and America. Undistinguished by the kinds of personalities or achievements of which history books tend to take note, Konin was nonetheless a culturally vibrant community with a secular Jewish library unique for its size and diversity throughout Poland. Then, in September 1939, the German army entered Konin, and a cycle of harassment, degradation, summary executions, and deportations began, until, by the middle of 1942, there were no more Jews left in the town. The majority of Konin's Jews were massacred only ten kilometers outside the town in the forest of Kazimierz Biskupi, one of the favorite places to picnic and gather mushrooms before the war.

Although his family, originally named Ryczke, came from Konin to London in 1913, Theo Richmond himself felt no real emotional ties with the town or its inhabitants until well into his adult years. While growing up,

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he heard his parents regularly mention their numerous Konin relatives, but his own interests lay more in making sure his English friends did not laugh at him for "the little, bent, foreign-looking old lady clothed in black" who was his grandmother. Even the 1968 publication of the *Konin Memorial Book*, an eight-hundred-page trove of information prepared by a group of Konin Jews in Israel to honor the memory of their lost families, did little to stir Richmond's curiosity. Then, in January 1987, idly leafing through the pages of the memorial volume, he once again found himself turning to the black-bordered, twenty-five-page roll call that listed more than two thousand names of Koniners murdered in the Shoah. This time the sight of so many Ryczkes numbered among the slaughtered had the effect of a sudden illumination, and Richmond instantly knew that "I must write a book of my own about the Jewish men and women of Konin, a book that would interweave past and present, that would be a confluence of two rivers, the Thames and the Warta."

In its structure such an episode recapitulates, almost to the point of parody, the moment of decisive emotional crystallization in a classical novel or a religious conversion story. Yet Richmond's text is not overwhelmed by its adherence to such archetypal models for three distinct, but interrelated reasons: first, he is aware of the potential absurdity of narrating his own suddenly fired enthusiasm in these terms, and his wryly self-deprecating tone does much to remove any risk of pomposity or bathos; second, the sheer intensity of his obsession, the seven-year immersion in Konin that prompted Richmond to travel all over the globe in search of the tiniest additional scrap of information, ends up persuading us that the analogy with classical accounts of a life-transforming illumination are actually not that far off the mark; and third, the book he creates out of his quest does, against all odds, fulfill its initial intent and interweaves past and present with the subtlety and imaginative density of one of the great, panoramic modern novels.

Richmond makes clear that he is not engaged in any ethnic self-rediscovery. When his friends suggest that he is "searching for roots," he recoils from such a "clichéd, sentimental" notion. He was also not interested in writing a book about the Shoah or even about the history of Polish Jewry. Instead his concentration was entirely on "the Jews of one particular community . . . above all, the texture and color of their everyday lives." Name by name, building by building, Richmond reconstructs his family's Konin past, and by the paradoxical laws of the literary imagination which hold that what is most local is usually what seems most vivid and alive, the very narrowness and exclusivity of his "parochial curiosity" give the book its real power.

Because Richmond's interest in Konin was sparked so late, most of the people he might have asked for information were already dead. Questions his parents could easily have settled remained unanswerable. Out of the common delusion that his mother and father would always be there, he simply never got around to questioning them about their youth in Poland. Because *Konin* is, in part, about the simultaneously laborious and thrilling effort to fill in the missing details, his parents' death was also a necessary precondition for Richmond to set out on his quest. His regret for the opportunities he let slip away forces him to start his search almost from scratch, and he is compelled to make up, by sheer persistence and ingenuity, for what he once had close at hand.

Now he must track down the dwindling number of Konin survivors in Britain, the United States, Canada, Israel, and Poland itself, and these encounters are among the most interesting moments in the book. There are such memorable figures as Morton (Motek) Mysch, a mainstay of the increasingly depleted Konin Society of New York, Mike Jacobs, who survived the Mauthausen death camp to become a wealthy Dallas businessman, and Alexander Piekarczyk, a retired architect in Tel Aviv whose forbidding manner leaves Richmond totally unprepared for his gift of detailed scale drawings of the house in which the Piekarczyk family lived in Konin as well as of the town's synagogue, ritual bath, and study house—drawings, that is, of the community's spiritual center. Often a meeting in one town leads to the suggestion to visit another ex-Koniner elsewhere, sometimes even on another continent, and it is from their different tales, as much as from the printed histories over which he pours, that Richmond pieces together his portrait of Jewish life in Konin.

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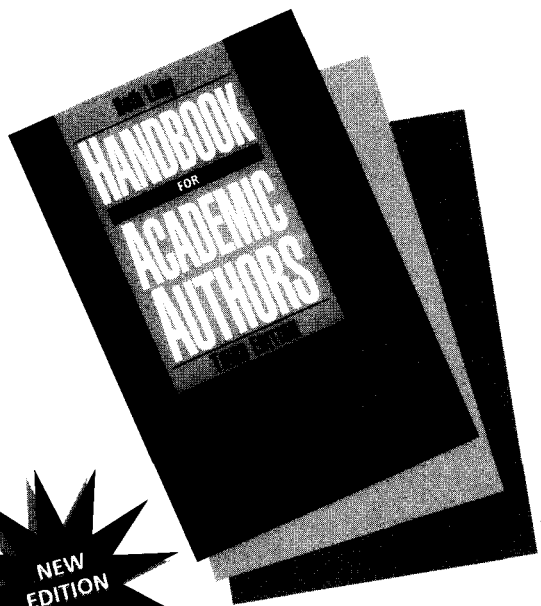

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Inevitably, many of the tales Richmond hears culminate in the horrors of the Shoah, and almost all of the people he interviews went through that inferno and lost their closest family members to the Nazis. These stories are harrowing, all the more so because, with a few exceptions, the speakers entirely avoid both self-dramatization and the corollary claim that their pain has given them a deeper insight into human nature. Another reason why their testimony is so moving, one that lies at the core of Richmond's whole project, is that in *Konin* we are not reading about anonymous "victims" suffering in some unimaginable foreign place, but about people with names, addresses, and daily activities with which the book has made us intimately familiar. Having learned, alongside Richmond himself, the quotidian habits and rhythms of normal Jewish life in Konin, the savage annihilation of that existence strikes us with far greater force.

Memory, in this case, does not flatten the past. Konin is depicted as a complex and heterogenous community, whose inhabitants are vividly differentiated. Jews had their own market square, called the Tepper Marik (Pottery Market), which served both as the economic hub of Jewish life in the town and as a passionate "debating forum," where "Bundists argued with leftwing Zionists, who argued with Communists, who argued with rightwing Revisionists, who argued with religious Zionists. Those who shared an ideology argued among themselves." Even when they are by concentration camp survivors, the stories Richmond hears about pre-war Konin are often exuberant and life-affirming, and, most important, they are not told as if the world they are describing were about to end; they are not colored by premonition and foreshadowing, and hence they can respect the enormous variety and internal differences in the community.

The *shtetl* is a world within a world, full of ideological antagonisms, communal cooperation, folk beliefs, and superstitions, and some of the characters Richmond hears about are as vividly depicted as any in Isaac Bashevis Singer's novels and stories. Many of the best accounts do not involve matters of ideology or belief at all, but emphasize prosaic household chores that are the foundation of everyday family existence. Thus, we learn such revivifying details as that the Sabbath *challah* (a yeast-leavened, white, egg bread, usually braided) had to be taken to the baker at one o'clock in the morning, after all the other bread had finished baking, because the more delicate *challah* dough does not require as much heat, and that when the oven has cooled down completely, the baker would sell the remaining charcoal to the tailors who used it in their pressing irons.

Through the gradual accumulation of details about every aspect of daily existence in Konin, from how to bake *challah* and pickle cucumbers to deciding the curriculum in the secular Jewish high school, Richmond's book succeeds in re-creating the life of one particular Jewish community with exemplary tact and empathy. Tribal memories are woven of people and their stories, and criteria of historical longevity or political success are surprisingly irrelevant to their emotional force. By itself, the liturgical command to remember is never sufficient to guarantee more than a formal recitation of names and dates. Before memory can become a living force for continuity, the Hebrew imperative, *zakhor*, needs to be enriched by the homely Yiddish saying: *"Mir zenen geknipt un gebindn"*—"we are knotted and bound to one another."

Don't Fence Him In

EMERSON: THE MIND ON FIRE. *By Robert D. Richardson, Jr. University of California Press. $35.*

Reviewed by JOHN P. SISK

From his earliest years, as his journals, lectures, and publications indicate, Ralph Waldo Emerson was passionately interested in biography. For him as for Plutarch it was instructive. As Professor Richardson puts it in his own impressive biography, Emerson "proposed to use the attainments of the departed great to illustrate the range of possibilities open to nineteenth century Americans." When in 1850 he published his *Representative Men*, however, there were no Americans in the book. Rich-

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ardson corrects this deficiency by making it clear that his subject, Emerson, was one of the most representative of Americans.

Emerson, of course, was never more representative than in his championship of the nonconforming, self-reliant individual for whom nothing is at last more sacred than the integrity of his own mind. This autonomous self also has to be a rejecting self, suspicious of all that is orthodox, established, and canonical. Authentic religious experience must be distinguished from a system of doctrines, which can only stifle or distort it; and when the truly religious self discovers this, he may have to liberate himself from that system, as Emerson did when he abandoned the Unitarian ministry—but without ceasing to be a preacher any more than he had ceased to be a teacher when earlier he had abandoned the classroom.

This Emersonian self, whether as preacher, teacher, or poet, had a very American attraction to the wild, to the creative Dionysian in him as against the limit-worshiping Apollonian. Here Emerson was strongly motivated by the advice his fabulous Aunt Mary Moody Emerson passed on to him and his dearly loved brothers: "Always do what you are afraid to do." This involved a willingness to confront the savage and the violent, even to subordinate the tame and civilized to the wild, in the interest of the real. It could even lead him when lecturing on "The Peace Principle" to praise war, its uses being to "educate the senses, call into action the will, and perfect the human constitution." No doubt, this was startling news to peace-loving abolitionists in the audience, but it was consistent with what he exclaimed when the Civil War started: "Ah! sometimes gunpowder smells good."

But it was also consistent with Emerson's lack of enthusiasm for the temperance movement, even when it was championed by a militant abolitionist such as William Lloyd Garrison. Mandatory temperance was another way to enfetter the questing spirit—that poetic self which, as Emerson wrote in his journal, wished "to write such rhymes as shall not suggest a restraint but contrariwise the wildest freedom." Thus he reacted enthusiastically to Walt Whitman's poetry, but Brook Farm with its self-limiting togetherness was not for him, hungry for unity though he could sometimes be. There was even a time when, married to his splendid second wife, Lidian, Emerson wondered whether a permanently fixed marital relationship couldn't be as enfettering to the questing self as organized religion. For him, as for the traditional Western cowboy, to be alive was not to be fenced in.

"We are all a little wild here," Emerson wrote to his longtime friend Thomas Carlyle. Manifestations of that wildness were the dozens of communes, the abolition, temperance, peace, and women's movements, to say nothing of feverish interest in phrenology, mesmerism, and clairvoyance. Richardson judges Emerson to be in his own way as wild as any of them in a time that takes us back now to the utopian euphorias of the 1790s and 1960s. "I unsettle all things," Emerson wrote in "Circles." As an experimenter and endless seeker, committed to the true romance of process, and "appalled by the crippling burden of the past," he anticipates the self as performance hero. This, of course, did not keep him from becoming increasingly aware of the threat posed by other fired-up selves bent on reforming the world before they had reformed themselves and all too likely to end up locked into some fanatically conceived unity: the inevitable consequence of believing, as he did himself, that "Nothing great is ever accomplished without enthusiasm." Emerson could be on the side of all the right causes, but, as Richardson points out, he was never entirely comfortable as an activist or an advocate. He could be as intransigent in his approval of John Brown's moral absolutism as his friend Thoreau was; but generally the longer he lived, the more the Apollonian in him asserted itself in a respect for clarity and limits.

When Emerson criticized Thoreau for lacking ambition, he was really saying that the man had no desire to make a stir in his own time. Never lacking ambition himself, and rarely hesitating to do what he was afraid to do, he made a considerable stir in his time. By the 1870s, says Richardson, "Emerson's reputation was so great that it had a life of its own." When he traveled to California, it was in a private railroad car from Chicago with George Pullman himself seeing him off. When he returned with his daughter Ellen from his third trip abroad, the train that carried them home to Concord blew its whistle all the way from Walden Pond to the depot. Emerson's funeral was a grand public affair, the mourners coming on special trains in such numbers that the

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balconies of the First Parish Church had to be reinforced to support them.

He had stirred his time by lecturing widely (his main source of income) in his own part of the world and in the midwestern states. Over a six-month period in the 1850s, he gave seventy-three lectures. On one outing in this period he gave twelve lectures in two weeks, each involving a train trip. In his last fourteen years he averaged forty-seven lectures a year. During his second trip abroad, he gave sixty-seven lectures in England and Scotland. The lectures (each delivered from a forty-page manuscript) gave evidence of an immense amount of reading. Richardson notes that Emerson "read without system and in all directions at once." In great part this was speed-reading marked by a great deal of skimming and skipping, but the variety and bulk of it is still astonishing. In fact, there are times when the reader is inclined to say that Richardson's book is a biography of Emerson's reaction to his reading—and collaterally, of course, a bibliography of the reading material available to the intellectually alive nineteenth-century American.

There is no way the biography of such a man as Emerson at such a time can be anything but an enormous reading assignment. Apart from the published work and the voluminous correspondence, there are the lectures, notebooks, journals, and indexes that together reached more than 230 volumes. Richardson himself may have had to skim his way over much of this material, but he gives the impression of a graceful and judicious mastery of it. The same thing is true when we need to know in some detail the authors his subject was reading. When, for instance, it is necessary to know the influence of Goethe on the young Emerson, we get in summary as much as we need about the former to understand his influence on the latter's thought and conduct. All the people important to Emerson read avidly and widely, the women no less than the men: Jones Very, Bronson Alcott, William Ellery Channing, George Ripley, and Henry Thoreau; Margaret Fuller, Caroline Sturgis, Elizabeth Hoar, and Elizabeth Peabody. By reading they kept themselves mutually on fire as they cooperated in the flowering of both New England and the Emersonian self.

Now none of these very literate people was more important to Emerson than his Aunt Mary, surely one of the remarkable women of her time. Her bed was shaped like a coffin, and she traveled in her burial shroud. Her nephew called her the Angel of Death, but she was his representative woman, and he never forgot the crucial part she had played in his self-development. When after her death he collected her writings and sayings, they filled four manuscript volumes. She gave him the support he needed when he suffered from recurring doubts about the uses he was making of his time or from the deaths of those closest to him: his beautiful first wife, Ellen, four of his brothers, and his son Waldo, for whom he had the highest expectations. Perhaps, too, she had helped him become what his rejecting and performing self might otherwise never have permitted: that Apollonian and fenced-in survivor, a man of character.

The Young Man and the Sea

CHARLES DARWIN: A BIOGRAPHY. Volume 1: VOYAGING. *By Janet Browne. Knopf. $35.*

Reviewed by MARK S. MICALE

Charles Darwin has been the most fully and finely biographized figure in the history of science. Well beyond a century after his death on April 19, 1882, accounts of the life and times of this most influential biological scientist number more than three dozen. Among others, the list includes Francis Darwin's *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (1887), Gamaliel Bradford's *Darwin* (1926), Leonard Huxley's *Charles Darwin* (1927), George Dorsey's *Evolution of Charles Darwin* (1927), Henshaw Ward's *Charles Darwin: The Man and His Warfare* (1927), William Irvine's *Apes, Angels, and Victorians: The Story of Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution* (1955), Arthur Keith's *Darwin Revalued* (1955), Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (1959), Gavin de Beer's *Charles Darwin: A Scientific Biography* (1965),

✪ MARK S. MICALE teaches the history of science and medicine at Yale University. He is the author, most recently, of *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations* and the editor of *Discovering the History of Psychiatry.*

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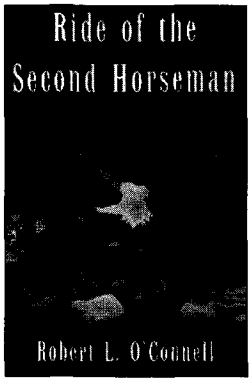

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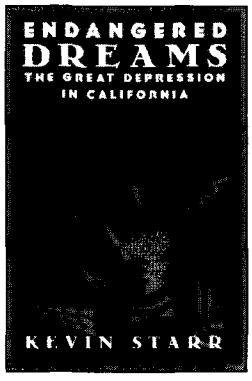

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Robert Olby's *Charles Darwin* (1967), John Chancellor's *Charles Darwin* (1973), Lewell Robert Stevens's *Charles Darwin* (1978), Peter Brent's *Charles Darwin: A Man of Enlarged Curiosity* (1981), Wilma George's *Darwin* (1982), and Ronald Clark's *The Survival of Charles Darwin: A Biography of a Man and an Idea* (1984).

Despite their many admirable qualities, these narratives of the life of the man who gave his name to a revolution in nineteenth-century thought were written without access to a mass of relevant primary documents, including autobiographies, diaries, letters, papers, personal books, and scientific manuscripts and notebooks. The years following the centennial of the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (1859) witnessed the emergence of "the Darwin industry." This industry consists of an army of historical scholars who, with great care and energy, have explored every imaginable nook and cranny of Darwin's life and work in an outpouring of specialized scholarship. Most valuable of these publications have been the complete, reliable, and critical editions of Darwin's own writings: a concordance to the *Origin* (1981); *Notebooks on Transmutation of Species* (1987), in which, between 1836 and 1844, Darwin delineated the development of his theory of natural selection, including his first bold but tentative (and wholly private) thoughts about the self-generation of new species; *A Calendar of the Correspondence of Charles Darwin, 1821–1882* (1985), which lists entries for almost fourteen thousand letters exchanged between Darwin and some eighteen hundred individuals; and the first nine volumes of the complete edition of *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* (1983–94), covering the period up to 1861 and expertly edited by an international team of scholars. The centennial of Darwin's death, in 1982, was marked by scores of scholarly meetings around the world and the publication of more than seventy volumes of essays on the great man and his work.

The Darwin industry, then, has produced one of the most impressive scholarly corpora in science history. In notable contrast to the bodies of commentary on Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud—those kindred "makers of the modern mind"—the Darwin literature reveals a high level of interpretative consensus. Needless to say, we know today vastly more about Darwin than we did even fifteen years ago. As a consequence, a century's worth of earlier biographies has become inadequate, if not obsolete, both factually and analytically.

Janet Browne's *Charles Darwin: Voyaging*, the first of a projected two-volume biographical study, is the full and magisterial beneficiary of this past generation of scholarship. Trained as both a biologist and historian of science and with extensive experience as the associate editor of the Darwin correspondence, Brown has the combined skills of the scientist, historian, and archivist. In telling Darwin's story, she draws comprehensively on the full array of new and previous materials about Darwin, including the enormous holdings of the Darwin Archive at Cambridge University Library and the Darwin House in Down, outside London.

In her book's more than six hundred pages, Browne reconstructs her subject's intellectual trajectory from youth to the eve of the publication of the *Origin* in November 1859. She gives us intricate and technically informed but accessible summations of Darwin's ideas on adaption, variation, and speciation. She deftly places his scientific work in the context of the general culture of Victorian science. And she artfully intertwines the personal, intellectual, and professional aspects of the Darwin story. All this is done in a lively, lucid, and quietly witty prose style.

Browne also relates the many well-known aspects of Darwin's life in an accurate and judicious fashion. She charts the transition of Darwin from an amateur collector of birds, beetles, and butterflies to a devoted and systematic investigative scientist. She evokes the world of early Victorian Cambridge, including the Oxbridge science patronage network to which Darwin was so deeply indebted. She juxtaposes Darwin's developing theoretical thinking against the progressive stages of his empirical observations. She shows how the sequence of Darwin's books and projects were part of an ever more encompassing scientific theory and sensibility. Darwinian evolution is, of course, not a single idea but a system of interlocking ideas; and Browne is excellent in establishing which of those ideas were common coin in early and mid-Victorian times, which were innovative syntheses of established beliefs, and which were radically new.

Browne discusses the strictly biographical aspects of her story sensitively and fair-mind-

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edly. This includes some of the most elusive and delicate episodes, including Darwin's strained but obedient relations with his paterfamilias, his pathetically inept and prosaic courtship of his wife (and cousin) Emma Wedgwood in the late 1830s, and the cruel and devastating death of the Darwins' beloved eldest daughter from scarlet fever in 1851 at the age of ten. On the endlessly debated issue of the religious and metaphysical implications of evolutionary science, Browne traces Darwin's developing—which is to say, diminishing—religious faith and his increasing rejection of the status of the Bible as an infallible text in relation to the history of the earth.

The famous story of Darwin's five-year journey on board the HMS *Beagle* forms the narrative centerpiece of *Charles Darwin: Voyaging.* I have read numberless accounts of the story but never fail to find it enthralling. Freshly graduated from Cambridge University, Darwin, twenty-two years of age, went to sea from 1831 to 1836 on a ninety-foot wooden boat that circumnavigated the globe. Sponsored by the British Admiralty, the *Beagle*'s official mission was to map portions of the southern Latin American coastline.

Darwin was brought along, almost inadvertently, as a kind of gentleman's companion to the ship's captain, the irascible Robert FitzRoy, who was himself only twenty-five years old at the outset of the voyage. Darwin's increasingly avid activities as "natural historian," modeled on similar pursuits undertaken during Captain Cook's celebrated travels to the South Pacific a half century earlier, rapidly became a major feature of the expedition.

In the lush detail of Browne's first volume, we read of young Darwin's legendary encounter with the Galápagos Islands; of his observations of the rude and aboriginal inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America who caused him for the first time to ruminate on the unbroken link between animals and humans; and of his first revulsion at confronting a full-fledged slave society in Brazil, at a time when Portugal was still legally transporting Africans to South America and while early Victorian Whigs back home (including members of the Darwin clan) agitated for the abolition of slavery.

Since Darwin is not generally known for inspired descriptive prose, it is remarkable to find him composing fine atmospheric accounts of the interior of a virgin Amazonian forest or rhapsodizing about the breathtaking peaks and valleys of the Andean Mountains. We can only imagine the effect that these sights must have had on a gentrified young man who had never before traveled beyond England's tame landscapes. Sad to reflect, too, that much of the landscape Darwin described during his voyage around the world has since been irretrievably destroyed.

Browne is sensible and discerning on the vexing subject of Darwin's ill health, too. Through his late twenties, Darwin was fit, robust, always active. In the immediate post-*Beagle* years, however, he exploded with symptoms. He suffered faintness, dizziness, headaches, cardiac palpitations, chest pains, facial swelling, trembling and shivering, tingling sensations, blurred vision, loss of appetite, and chronic tiredness; above all, he experienced endless gastrointestinal disturbances, including bouts of nausea and vomiting. Darwin was excruciatingly self-conscious about his maladies and at times kept a health diary in which he recorded, described, and ranked the day's symptoms with a thoroughness characteristic of his scientific work.

Theories to explain Darwin's curious, debilitating invalidism—a sort of Victorian male hysteria—abound. Some biographers have retrospectively diagnosed his as a case of Chagas' disease, which they trace to an insect bite and an acute feverish illness Darwin suffered in Chile in October 1834. Others have variously stressed the role of overwork, emotional problems stemming from disturbing family situations in his childhood and adolescence, anxiety and depression owing to family losses, his wife's oversolicitous care, and the hostile scientific, social, and religious reception of his ideas. Some commentators have emphasized hereditary influences, others environmental factors. My own theory is that the florid nervous symptomatology of Darwin's adulthood was caused by the inevitable stresses and strains of his later life, but was patterned creatively on the unendurable seasickness that racked Darwin throughout his five years on the *Beagle* in the 1830s—a sort of psychogenic embellishment of his earlier organic suffering.

Browne details Darwin's medical history with great care. She shows that patienthood became a way of life for Darwin, as well as the Darwin household, and served both to color

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Darwin's adult personality and to shield him from the outside world's distractions and harassments that mounted with his fame.

If Browne proves a reliable guide through these murky biographical episodes, her judgments of Darwin's scientific corpus are both keen and thoughtful. She properly stresses Darwin's great contribution to the geological as well as botanical and zoological sciences of his day. (His studies on the elevation of the Andean Mountain range and the formation of Pacific coral reefs remain first-rate monographs of Victorian science.) She also discusses his eight-year, multi-volume study of Atlantic sea barnacles as a key part of his theory of the plasticity of species. I was particularly pleased to find Browne giving equal emphasis to the inductive and deductive dimensions of Darwin's thought. Several recent biographies have tended to dwell on Darwin the Baconian hyper-empiricist, as if, after dumbly accumulating bits of information about the world's flora and fauna for three decades, Darwin stumbled upon his paradigm-breaking theory of evolution by natural selection. In an important corrective, Browne gives us Darwin the scrupulous observer and collector complemented directly by Darwin the bold, creative, brilliant, and at times extravagant scientific theoretician.

Browne narrates two or three episodes of Darwin's life in greater detail than most readers will care to know. Darwin's sexuality is never addressed in the volume, nor in any other biography of the man, as though even to raise the issue about a figure so resolutely unerotic would be a breach of professional decorum. Also, given the amount of learning available in the body of the book, the scholarly notations at the end are rather skimpy. But these are only quibbles.

In my judgment, only Adrian Desmond and James Moore's *Darwin: The Life of a Tormented Evolutionist* (1991) even remotely compares with Browne's biography. Although Browne lacks the sparkling style and sheer narrative drive of Desmond and Moore, her account is refreshingly free of the doggedly sociological model of science history that animates the Desmond-Moore book and that at times imparts to it a quality of special pleading. With two projected volumes, Browne's coverage is also much more detailed. "There was a time when I thought this book should perhaps be called *Darwin: Another Biography*," Browne frets in her acknowledgments. It would as well be titled *Darwin: **The** Biography.*

Vive le Livre

THE GUTENBERG ELEGIES: THE FATE OF READING IN AN ELECTRONIC AGE. *By Sven Birkerts. Faber and Faber. $22.95.*

Reviewed by DAVID SIMPSON

Ever since the publication of Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964), students of literature have had to endure anxious prophecies about the fate of reading. Books, we have been repeatedly forewarned, are dying. And so is print culture.

More recently, with the spectacular emergence of the Internet, CD-ROM, fiber optics, interactive multimedia, and all the other dazzling triumphs of the digital age, the vital signs of reading seem to have grown even fainter. According to several projections, by the time the current generation of MTV watchers turns forty, the printed page will be all but obsolete. Libraries, instead of being active resources, will become virtual museums, hangouts for the digitally dysfunctional or the hopelessly nostalgic. The morning newspaper will no longer be lofted by a carrier into shrubbery or onto a damp porch, but will arrive bright and dry on a videoscreen. Weekly magazines, custom-edited to the user's exact requirements and specifications, will be accessible on-line or in video format via interactive narrowcast TV. Anyone, virtually anywhere on the globe, will be instantly reachable by wireless pocketphone. Fearless cybernauts will be cruising the information superhighway like commuters during rush hour, and the U.S. postal service, at long last superceded by electronic mail, will have gone the way of the pony express. People everywhere will be constantly, continually, madly *communicating.* What they will not be doing, apparently, is reading books.

Such at any rate is the vision of the elec-

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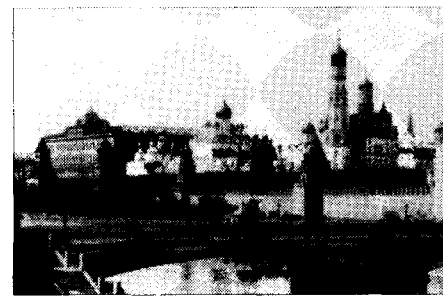

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tronic future that emerges from an entire funeral procession of recent cultural studies, most of them bearing suitably mournful titles like "The End of Books" or *The Death of Literature,* and all ruefully forecasting the death of the word. But, as even a brief glance at cultural history indicates, oracular pronouncements and dire predictions of this sort are remarkably common at times when established technologies are being challenged or displaced by newer ones.

The history of communications technology is particularly instructive in this respect. For it shows that ever since the displacement of oral culture by alphabetic writing (during the first millenium B.C.), virtually every new medium for storing or disseminating information has been greeted with grand auguries of a new Golden Age on the one hand and by howls of protest and fear and trembling on the other. Socrates, it is worth recalling, inveighed against writing. He supposed that by drying up the sacred wells of memory, the written word would hobble the intellect and corrupt the soul. Similarly, long before PTA and school board members began fretting about television (or more recently, and with even deeper trepidation, about Sega and Nintendo), their predecessors fumed about the sharp decline in intelligence and morality that would presumably follow from prolonged exposure to films, funny papers, comic books, and animated cartoons. Mencken fulminated against the radio, which he considered a potentially totalitarian device certain to lead to general illiteracy and widespread commercial and political smog. And in much the same vein, Luther feared that the mass production of texts via movable type would encourage a shallow, superficial new manner of reading.

Technical breakthroughs, in short, tend to trigger extreme emotional reactions, particularly among intellectuals. This is something that both Webheads and neo-Luddites alike might ponder as computer technology moves beyond the high-tech era into the *ultra-* or *meta-*tech stage. It is also something to bear in mind when assessing works such as Sven Birkerts's *Gutenberg Elegies,* yet another somber meditation on the demise of literary culture and the death of the book. An essayist and reviewer who has published three volumes of criticism, Birkerts is unabashedly bookish. He frankly admits to preferring the look and feel of printed pages and bound covers to the iridescent glare of the videoscreen, which in his view gives words an aura of vaporousness and unreality. His is not only the latest contribution to a suddenly popular subject (ironically, books about the disappearance of books are much in vogue these days), but also one of the most thoughtful and passionate. Despite its promise of "extrapolations, predictions, warnings," and the rest of it, this work is not so much a polemical counterblast against electronic media as a kind of gallant and defiant last stand. Its genre is in part that of the moralizing defense or vehement apology for literature (in the tradition of Sidney and Shelley); but its style and spirit suggest less a public utterance in a lecture hall or forum than a private rumination by a ruins or gravesite.

The book is exceedingly well titled, for its chapters are *elegies* indeed, almost Wertherian in their soulfulness and sorrow. A note of lamentation is struck in the very first section and seems to resonate throughout the entire volume; in fact, only in a final "Coda," where Birkerts expresses a fear that modern society is foolishly signing a devil's pact with digital technology, does he build up to anything like a full, apocalyptic conclusion, with the usual dark forebodings and gnashing of teeth.

I suspect that a majority of adult readers today already share many of Birkerts's concerns and convictions. Such readers are likely, for instance, to be skeptical, and a little resentful, about a number of the extravagant claims and gilded promises being made on behalf of the digital revolution. They may feel more than a little apprehensive about the threat posed by electronic media to traditional book-based learning. Such readers will find in Birkerts a kindred spirit, a writer whose sincere affection for imaginative literature is evident on nearly every page. They will also recognize in him a critic who genuinely cares about the future of literary study, who clearly cherishes the joy of reading, and who doesn't simply pay lip service to the moral and cultural power of great books. Such works, Birkerts claims, erode our sense of "irreconcilable otherness," broaden our awareness of human interrelationships, and quicken our "empathic nerve."

Unfortunately, once they've finished *The Gutenberg Elegies,* these same readers may also conclude that solemn tributes and pious pronouncements in honor of reading form essen-

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tially the whole motive and content of the book. After a while Birkerts's tone begins to seem almost too fervent and sincere, and the reader longs for some relieving flash of anger or humor, some refreshing display of irony or capering wit. Instead, Birkerts all too often seems like a distraught eulogist tearfully enumerating the splendors of a deceased loved one. Such a performance is bound to have a curious effect on readers who, like myself, feel that books are still very much alive, if not entirely well, and that reports of their death at the hands of video barbarians and electronic hordes are therefore either greatly exaggerated or premature.

Birkerts generally seems far more interested in offering plangent testimonials to the pleasures of reading than in producing credible historical arguments or sound philosophical evidence in support of his assertions. On the other hand, he does introduce a plausible and very interesting thesis. In essence, he claims that our Western concept of an individual ego or psyche—of a soulful and inward *deep self*—is strongly rooted in the history of reading. He holds that this particular notion of personal identity and selfhood is more than just a cultural by-product or coincidental side effect of the written word; it is, he declares, largely a *creation* of the experience of literary texts, especially novels.

This is a provocative thesis, though one that the author unfolds more or less casually and in brief lyrical stretches rather than systematically and in logical detail:

> There is a metaphysics of reading that has to do with a good deal more than any simple broadening of the mind. Rather, it involves a change of state and inner orientation, and if we contemplate the reading process in this light we can hardly get away from introducing the . . . *soul* (or something very like it) into the conversation (p. 80).
>
> [While reading] I feel an inside limberness, a sense of being for once in accord with time—real time, deep time. Duration time, within which events resonate and *mean*. When I am at the finest pitch of reading, I feel as if the whole of my life—past as well as unknown future—were somehow available to me. . . . I register a definite circuit of awareness that I am, in the present, part of a more extensive circuit, a circuit channeling what Wallace Stevens called "the substance in us that prevails" (p. 84).
>
> The time of reading, the time defined by the author's language resonating in the self, is not the world's time, but the soul's. I don't know how else to define the soul in secular terms except as a kind of self-consistent condensation of self. Reading makes this soul more present (p. 85).

His belief that reading plays a necessary role in the making and shaping of the soul explains why Birkerts is appalled by the prospect of a bookless future. He feels that it is only through literature that we fully discover ourselves, only through books that we approach our deepest and most authentic state of being. Viewed in this way, the reading of fiction in particular is an activity that goes infinitely beyond mere information processing, and even far beyond ordinary imagining or thinking. When we read a novel, in his view, it is as if we break through to some ultimate level of human consciousness, to a sphere of pure reverie and spiritual rapture.

As a bookish person myself, and especially as a teacher of literature, I must say I find this exalted view of reading compelling. I am quite willing to subscribe to it as a matter of opinion or as an article of faith. But is it actually true—historically or anthropologically speaking—to say that books are indispensable to the cultivation of inwardness or the formation of a deep self? Is Birkerts therefore right to proclaim *homo litteratus* the highest version of our species?—a type clearly superior in consciousness to the presumably soulless jabberers who preceded us and the brave new digital creatures who might follow?

Certainly it is true that the rise of individualism has coincided with, and been strongly influenced by, the rise of reading. But this hardly makes the individual psyche a creation of literary culture. On the contrary, a deep consciousness of the self is already evident in the predominantly oral culture of classical civilization, most notably in the habits of reflection and introspection exemplified in Greek lyric and drama (two genres specifically designed for live performance rather than for the written page). A striking awareness of a hidden and deeply private self can also be found in the Hebrew Bible, in the Stoic and Gnostic creeds of the Hellenistic period, and in early Christian writings. Paul, for example, was certainly no reader of novels; in fact, he was barely literate and reportedly dictated his epistles before signing them with a cramped scrawl.

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Birkerts's view that reading is essential to the development of inward depth and moral empathy is further contradicted not only by the numerous *non*-readers who conspicuously possess these qualities but also by the many bookish types who are notably deficient in them. To the first category belong unlettered geniuses and culture heroes from Socrates to Louis Armstrong as well as such raw figures as Woody Guthrie, the Okie folk sage, or John Muir, the decidedly unbookish American travel writer and naturalist whose reading (confined mostly to the Bible and Shakespeare) may have been narrow but whose own vibrant writings positively overflow with soul. As for the second category, it is enough simply to cite the facile wordsmith and bookworm Joseph Goebbels and all the other cultural paragons of the Reich who pored over their Goethe, savored their Hölderlin, and casually stoked the fires of the crematoria. Modern history has all but shattered the view that absorption in literature necessarily purifies the spirit or opens the heart.

Birkerts believes—in the tradition of Socrates, Luther, Mencken, and McLuhan—that a single dominant medium can effectively define and alter an entire culture. He also evidently feels that the way we receive and process information determines us not just subtly and superficially, but essentially and deeply. This is why he thinks the effects of a media shift from print to electronic text will be far-reaching and, for literary culture at least, disastrous. The switch from page to screen is no minor step in cultural evolution, as he sees it, but a powerful and decisive turn, a mutation that threatens to modify the deep character of human beings once and for all. But is the book format itself (from the original handwritten codex volumes of the first century to the modern paperback) really so vital to our humanity? Surely it is *language*, not print per se or a particular type of literary packaging, that shapes and connects us. From the hieroglyphs and ideograms of ancient and primitive cultures to the mathematician's ciphers and the modern e-mailer's emoticons, it is not any particular medium but symbolic communication in general and in whatever form that makes us human and develops our inner selves.

Besides, books are not going to die. The dominion of the word today is stronger than ever. Worldwide literacy rates are increasing, not decreasing. Four million new Americans are being born each year, and almost every one of them will learn how to read and write. True, most of their composition and reading may well be done on an electronic screen rather than with pen and paper and printed book. Their contact with literary texts in particular will in all likelihood be in hypertext format (with audio and video enhancements) via CD-ROM disks or downloadings from the Internet rather than from bound volumes from a library shelf. However—and this is the critical point—these new readers will still be encountering Twain's or Kafka's or Dante's or some author's own words.

As for the trusty paperback, it, I suspect, is in no more danger of being completely replaced by an electronic substitute than golf and tennis are likely to be replaced by video versions or hiking and skiing by ski machines. As I'm sure Birkerts himself would agree, the true pleasures of reading still seem to require stitched pages and printed words, and so at least until some manufacturer invents a computer that may be lazily operated from a park bench or a propped position in bed, or in an oak-paneled and lamp-lit study, or at poolside, or on a sunny beach, or in a snug wilderness cabin or shady glen, the book as we know it will survive.

Volte-Face

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A FACE. *By Lucy Grealy. Houghton Mifflin. $19.95.*

Reviewed by FELICIA ACKERMAN

If you could judge a book by its blurbs, this book would have much to overcome. One of the hardcover jacket blurbs tells us that the book, a memoir about the author's disfigured face, is a "beautiful book about the terrible obsessions and perceptions of physical beauty that so dominate our culture," a book it "is impossible to read . . . without being changed,

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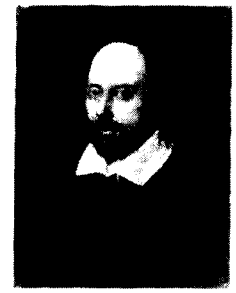
Alvin Kernan



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challenged." Another blurb, this one by self-help guru Bernie Siegal, M.D., author of *Love, Medicine and Miracles*, exhorts everyone to "read it and free yourself to live a complete life free of the fear of rejection and filled with love and relationships. We are all scared but we can be healed. Read on!" Add to this the fact that the author's disfigurement resulted from Ewing's sarcoma, an aggressive childhood cancer, and what would you expect the book to say? Cancer is an opportunity for personal growth. There is nothing to fear but fear itself. Conventional beauty standards are sexist and oppressive; if it weren't for the "heteropatriarchy," no one would consider Marilyn Monroe more beautiful than a woman missing part of her jaw. True beauty shines from within. The book is bound to toe this line, right?

Wrong. Lucy Grealy, who, to judge from this elegantly written memoir, is incapable of using a word like *heteropatriarchy*, has a commonsense, cut-through-the-bromides approach so different from the usual contemporary discussions of illness and ugliness that it amounts to originality. Cancer as an opportunity for personal growth? At one point, inspired by *Siddhartha*, Grealy decided that she should "see my face as an opportunity to find something that had not yet been revealed . . . [as] a gift to be used toward understanding and enlightenment." Unfortunately, however,

> I tried my best, but for the most part I was as abysmal at seeking enlightenment as I had once been at playing dodge ball. No matter how desperately I wanted to catch that ball, I dropped it anyway. And as much as I wanted to love everybody in school and to waft esoterically into the ether when someone called me ugly, I was plagued with petty desires and secret, evil hates.

There is nothing to fear but fear itself? Grealy's well-meaning mother tried that line on her. But it simply gave Grealy the additional burden of struggling to maintain the "right" attitude—and the right behavior, since the slogan "meant in this instance that I should conquer the fear by not crying." To Grealy, even as a child, the slogan's inappropriateness was self-evident.

> The second week of chemo[therapy] was worse in that I knew what to expect. This presented a curious reversal of fear for me, because I already understood that with other types of pain the fear of not knowing about it usually brought about more suffering than the thing itself. This was different. This was dread. It wasn't some unknown black thing hovering and threatening in the shadows; it had already revealed itself to me and, knowing that I knew I couldn't escape, took its time stalking me.

Everyone is beautiful in her own way once we free ourselves of the "heteropatriarchy"? Grealy seems unacquainted with that particular nostrum. True beauty shines from within? Try telling that to a bunch of junior high school boys who are taunting you about your scarred and misshapen face. Grealy endured plenty of taunting in school, and there, too, she found the conventional wisdom useless.

> My initial tactic was to pretend I didn't hear [the tormentors], but this only seemed to spur them on. In the hallways, where I suffered similar attacks of teasing from random attackers, I simply looked down at the floor and walked more quickly, but in the lunchroom I was a sitting duck. The same group took to seeking me out and purposely sitting near me day after day, even when I tried to camouflage myself by sitting in the middle of a group. They grew bolder. . . .
>
> After two weeks I broke down and went to my guidance counselor to complain. I thought he would offer to reprimand them, but instead he asked if I'd like to come and eat in the privacy of his office. Surprised, I said yes, and that's what I did for the rest of the year whenever I was attending school.

Grealy does not criticize this solution, but it is open to an obvious objection: Why not keep the tormentors, rather than the target, out of the lunchroom? Still, the counselor's tactic seems better than what would probably happen nowadays—earnest, compulsory class discussions about sensitivity and physical "differences," discussions that could hardly fail to intensify the disfigured girl's self-consciousness and make others regard her in clinical terms.

So what did work for Grealy? Nothing worked perfectly; of course it is better not to be disfigured. But she found relief in many ways. As a child, she found comfort in animals, who "neither disapproved nor approved of what I looked like" and in her own vivid inner life. At times, she relished the drama of her situation, although she was never able to con-

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vince herself for long that having cancer was better than not having it. She could even have friends or at least playmates, providing she was willing to endure such occasional gaucheries as "[Are you dying?] The other kids say that you're slowly dying, that you're 'wasting away.'"

But her eventual salvation was a scholarship to Sarah Lawrence. All at once, she was part of a world that immersed her in literature (the account of her burgeoning passion for poetry is one of the most moving, but least original parts of the book), that valued her own rapidly developing literary talents, that not only tolerated but glorified oddity, and that provided her with genuine friends who shared her interests.

Soon, however, Grealy wanted more than friendship. She craved sex and romantic love, but these did not come to her in college. In one of the book's few false notes, she writes, "The major reason I was still a virgin when I graduated from college was obviously the lack of genuine opportunities combined with my crippling lack of self-esteem, but I persisted in seeing it as proof that I had lost out on the world of love only because of my looks." While Grealy is no doubt right about the paucity of genuine opportunities ("The female-to-male ratio at [Sarah Lawrence] was three to one, and much of the male third [*sic*] of the population was, for varying reasons, unavailable"), I leave it to the reader to decide, whether, in the world as it is, a woman's severely disfigured face is apt to be less of an impediment to romance than her lack of "self-esteem."

In graduate school and beyond, Grealy did find lovers, as well as the knowledge that, however deformed her face, she had a "sexy body." She also experienced the excitement and anonymity of living abroad and eventually had a final series of operations that were more successful than the earlier attempts at reconstructing her face.

Contrary to Dr. Bernie Siegal's claim, this book will not "heal" you. It is not ointment. It will not free you to live a complete life free of the fear of rejection. It can even be taken to have a decidedly uninspirational moral (although this is not a moral Grealy draws): If you are going to have a disfigured face, you had better be brilliant, imaginative, talented, slender, and sexy. And able to obtain good medical care as well—when Grealy had to go on Medicaid, the doctor who had previously operated on her announced that he "had far too much work right then to do the operation himself" and turned her over to others. The resulting operation and recovery were hellish.

The book's medicinal value may be nil, but its literary value is substantial. In fact, some of the best passages have nothing to do with Grealy's cancer or her appearance. For example,

> The local television [weather report] showed a map of New York with cottonball clouds floating over it, clouds weeping blue raindrops mixed with white circles of hail. The whole picture looked like the thought balloons over cartoon characters' heads, as if New York State itself was *considering* icy rain, thinking it over. (Italics in original.)

You will probably be so busy appreciating such imaginative writing that you will forget to feel sorry for its author.

Boston Poetry Party

THE FADING SMILE: POETS IN BOSTON, FROM ROBERT FROST TO ROBERT LOWELL TO SYLVIA PLATH, 1955–1960. *By Peter Davison. Knopf. $24.*

Reviewed by ROBERT B. HEILMAN

This is a kind of group biography, or an assemblage of biographical sketches or snapshots, of several dozen poets and of an infusion of other writers, professors, and editors who lived in Boston and its vicinity, worked there for a while, or came to Boston for some occasion or other, or just visited there, or picked up prizes, or took courses, read there, or otherwise experienced honorabilitudinitate (used it at last!) there, in the later 1950s. The author circulated among them as poet (he was just beginning to break into song), but he also enjoyed status as an editor; in the double role of artist-playmate and holder of power, he evi-

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dently got around a lot and knew what was going on in bookeries, bakeshops, bars, bandwagons, barbecues, basements, and bedrooms.

Mr. Davison reports on who went with whom, slept with whom, or married whom; who hosted parties, who came, and who got drunker than who; who went to whose lectures and seminars, and who seemed to profit from them; who went to what psychiatrist and when and what happened if anything; who attempted suicide and who succeeded; who read or studied what, and what he or she made of it; who participated—as actor, director, or otherwise—in amateur or post-amateur theatricals. Davison comes in somewhere between the gossip columnist and the creator of the one-ton biography that has been destroying forests everywhere; he's much closer to the former but now and then yearns a little toward the latter. He injects a note of high seriousness by quoting in full, or more or less in full, poems by himself, Wilbur, Merwin, Hall, Sexton (2), Plath (2), Adrienne Rich, L. E. Sissman (6), Kunitz (3), and Lowell (4), as well as parts of other poems, and some relevant prose, along the way. These ten (of whom Davison is the first) provide the organizing centers of a series of chapters, each of which introduces also the personal and professional activities of various other versifiers, many of them repeatedly present.

Seventeen photographs contribute to the reader's sense of being present in a striving, struggling, active and inter-active quasi-community of makers who range from achieved royalty to aspiring wanna-bes and who ease or assist the struggle with loyalties, liquor, love, listening to masters lay it out at lectures or dictating at digs, visiting psychiatrists (who may beget religious devotion or atheism), and eventually going home to sweat in the solitude that is the ultimate matrix of new life in print. And we see a good deal of the exchanging of manuscripts, even with the risk of entrusting the beloved brainchild to the no-holds-barred rigor of a candor-proud truth-serving inspector. But one might also find a kindly neighbor-in-need, willing to mingle needed blessings with a few peripheral comments on how, let's say, some punctuational alterations might serve well. A lot of interesting human beings lived in this world or dropped in for some reason or other, and one lets curiosity have its head in observing their comings and goings, interplay and intercourse, psyches and souls.

The last central element in the book, before the standard terminal utilities, is a thirteen-page "Chronology"—that is, a series of one-line or two-line listings of events or doings or happenings, year by year, from 1954 through 1963. They are mostly about individuals ("George Starbuck enters graduate study at the University of Chicago"), though a score or so identify political events, mainly in the United States but a few elsewhere in the world ("1949. January 2. Fidel Castro takes control of Havana"). The relative frequency of the references to people in the writing business, from poets to editors, is interesting. I counted 57 to Lowell, 49 to Plath (only a modest 24 to Ted Hughes), 36 to Anne Sexton. And there are 36 to the author himself, who thus is able to reveal a brief amorous fling with a poetess en route to major status and some expressions of editorial power—acceptances and rejections that he made. Then we drop down to 17 for Merwin, and everyone else (about 50, including a few non-literary entries) comes in at 11 or fewer. We recall, of course, that not every maker, American or import, lived in or visited Boston in this period, and it seems safe to assume that Frost, who gets only 4 references (despite his prominent place in the lengthy sales-pitch title of the book), was not as much of a party person as some of the others.

Well, the book offers easier reading than many books of greater length and more severe critical aspirations. Of how much use it would be to authors in the other category, it is hard to say. And of course one is glad to note the happy absence of the chichi vocabularies of recent literary discussion.

Table 52

WINCHELL: GOSSIP, POWER, AND THE CULTURE OF CELEBRITY. *By Neal Gabler. Knopf. $30.*

Reviewed by JACOB A. STEIN

I know and have known people mentioned as sources in Neal Gabler's biography of Walter Winchell. First, Lee Meyers. Lee was a

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New York press agent who made a good living by getting clients' names mentioned in Winchell's column. Lee was quite friendly with Mary Lou Bentley, Winchell's sometime mistress. Her picture is included in Mr. Gabler's book. The legend under her picture says she was "regarded as one of the most beautiful women in New York." The picture was supplied to Mr. Gabler "through the courtesy of Eddie Jaffe." I confirm, based on personal knowledge, that Eddie is a courteous gentleman. Eddie's unfailing courtesy brought him a bouquet of clients, including the burlesque queen Margie Hart, billed as the poor man's Greta Garbo, and Ann Corio, the star of Star and Garter. Both names appeared frequently, much to Eddie's economic delight, in Winchell's column.

Then there is the late Ernest Cuneo. Ernest was knowledgeable about Walter Winchell's rise and he was the prime authority on Winchell's decline and fall. Ernest lived a life many would like to have lived. He was a college football star at Columbia and then played professional football. He practiced big-time law. He was a journalist and wrote a biography of his friend Fiorello LaGuardia. He was the link between the World War II British secret service manipulator William Stevenson, the man called Intrepid, and Wild Bill Donovan, of the American secret service. Ernest was a great talker and an impatient listener. It seemed unlikely that he and Winchell would find common ground. Who would do the listening? But, somehow, they did. Cuneo vetted Winchell's columns to remove defamatory statements. He injected gossip concerning political figures. He sat with Winchell in the Stork Club, commenting on the passing scene with a full appreciation of its superficiality. He made notes concerning his two books on theories of the hidden dialectic determinative of human history.

Mr. Gabler includes the word *celebrity* in his subtitle. There are a multiplicity of words that join with *celebrity*—words such as *popular, renowned, famous,* and *notorious.* Winchell, in his life and times, passed through each of these designations.

In the 1930s, nine out of ten American adults heard or read Walter Winchell between his 9:00 P.M. Sunday night broadcast and his Monday morning column. He averaged 50 million readers a day, totaling 300 million a week. During those times Ernest Cuneo was the New Deal handyman for all seasons. He saw Winchell's value to Franklin D. Roosevelt's third-term strategy. Cuneo, as the broker, passed scoops and gossip to Winchell in exchange for Winchell's weekly broadsides, which became a major factor in Roosevelt's obtaining his third term. The exclusives and the week's White House agenda that Cuneo gave Winchell widened Winchell's audience to include Wall Street financiers, Pittsburgh steel barons, Detroit auto magnates, and AFL-CIO headquarters.

How did Walter Winchell, the small-time song and dance man, get himself a White House connection? Neal Gabler sets out the facts in impressive detail. It begins with Winchell's birth in 1897 in New York City of immigrant parents. Winchell described his childhood as unrelieved deprivation, poverty, and parental discord. His escape came by way of the Imperial Vaudeville Theatre located across the street from the Harlem apartment building where he lived. The lights of the Imperial inspired Winchell to learn to sing and dance while still in knickers. He talked his way onto the Imperial stage, and then he joined Gus Edwards's vaudeville troupe, billed as Gus Edwards's schoolboys. The act consisted of boys and girls barely in their teens who sang and danced to Edwards's songs such as "By the Light of the Silvery Moon," "In My Merry Oldsmobile," "If I Was a Millionaire," "Look Out for Jimmy Valentine," and "School Days." Bing Crosby played Gus Edwards in the 1930s movie *The Star Maker.*

Winchell understood that a theatrical career required him to find a way to keep his name in circulation. He wrote short items for a trade publication, a one-pager, distributed free of charge, the *Vaudeville News.* Some of Winchell's gossipy items were published using his own name. Soon these submissions became a Winchell column called "Broadway Hearsay."

The *Vaudeville News* column eventually brought an offer to write a column for a real newspaper, the New York *Evening Graphic.* Bernarr McFadden put up the money for the *Graphic.* Small and sickly as a child, McFadden weight-lifted himself into a handsome physical specimen. His business ventures with health clubs and his strong-man publicity stunts brought McFadden renown and the lucre that

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often accompanies renown. He put money into publishing a magazine called *True Story*. It retailed the real-life stories of the little people, written by themselves, telling how each overcame a broken heart, found someone else, and lived happily ever after. With *True Story* money McFadden commenced the publication of his own New York City newspaper devoted to lurid news in headlines. Winchell matched the *Graphic* profile. He signed on as the *Graphic*'s Broadway columnist at $75 a week plus a 15 percent commission on all theater advertising Winchell sold—moderately good wages for 1924.

Winchell's Broadway friends gave him a testimonial dinner to launch his career as a New York columnist. He was told by Jimmy Walker, then a New York State senator, that he could keep his friends and be a failure or lose them and be a success. Winchell took the advice to heart. He defined himself as the adversary of all the other columnists who used New York City, its life and times, as a resource for their column. Winchell's market entry advantage was his wide acquaintance with the marginal, the underworld, the plain clothesmen, the chorus girls, the madams, and the head waiters. His unique network brought in gossip nicely seasoned with scandal. Winchell treated it all as news of the utmost importance and urgency. He conveyed a constant sense of crisis that set the tone of his column and later that of his radio broadcast.

When his column appeared in the *Graphic*, it was thought that somebody would shut it down as a public nuisance. Nobody did. As time went by, Winchell perfected his art. Hearst took Winchell from the *Graphic* and placed him with the New York *Mirror*, where he stayed for thirty years, turning out his daily column.

Before long, Winchell was discovered by radio. His rousing Sunday night program transferred the sense of urgency and crisis to the airways. He went on the air to the clatter of a telegraph key transmitting an urgent message to "Mr. and Mrs. North and South America and all the ships at sea." His audience included many living in trailers or row houses on the wrong side of the tracks, but who were entitled to learn, at once, as soon as it happened, that Tommy Manville wants a divorce

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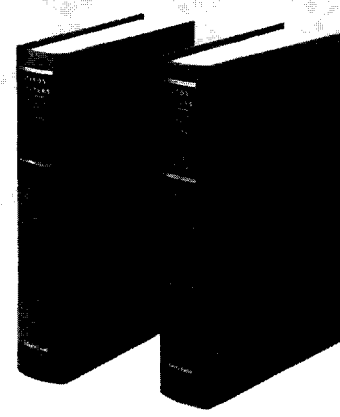

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and that Clark Gable may be in love.

Winchell did his column and his radio show with a paid staff of only a few people. The real staff consisted of crowds of press agents whose clients paid COD rates of $75 for landing a client's witticism in Winchell's column and $150 for a flattering comment. Press agents flooded Winchell with material. Eddie Jaffe submitted as many as ten pages daily of jokes, anecdotes, and gossip that included the names of Eddie's clients. Lee Meyers treated the Winchell column as the central target of all his efforts. Jaffe and Meyers, in Mr. Gabler's pages, are neutral on Winchell as a man. It was Winchell's column they studied. As far as they were concerned, Winchell was entirely ethical. He never demanded a bribe as an entrance fee to the column. Unlike Damon Runyon, he never used his column to affect the odds on fighters and horses in which he had a concealed interest. Other Broadway columnists could be bought at low rates in exchange for a favorable mention.

Lee Meyers is retired and living in Florida. Lee has vivid recollections of seeing Winchell promenading at the old Roney Plaza in the 1940s. Lee was a military man at the time. Winchell was very generous with his time. He invited Lee in to watch Winchell blast out his Sunday night broadcast. Years later Lee took permanent residence in Florida, first as the publicity man of the Jackie Gleason brigade. When Jackie Gleason retired, Lee stayed in Florida; he returns to New York very rarely. Eddie Jaffe is a New York and L.A. man. Both see the old days as the good times: interesting people and beautiful girls and every week a client mentioned in Winchell's column. Lee Meyers has fond memories of Mary Lou Bentley, the long-stemmed Texas Rose whom Winchell loved and lost. Lee Meyers recalls her as quiet and affectionate. What she saw in . . . well, well, well.

An examination of Winchell's column selected at random in 1932 shows a mixture of personal reflections, gossip, comments on the art of worldly wisdom, and the inside story that explains just why certain things happened the way they did. It also set forth predictions of things that Winchell knew had already happened. Each item is just a sentence or two, and each is separated by three dots. Slang, puns, and neologisms are generously distributed. Winchell mentions Tom Mix's wedding. He says Mrs. Irving Berlin is having a baby. Celebrities are getting sick and getting well. Behind each mention, one assumes, is a press agent's victory.

Winchell's reports of "who was romancing whom, who was cavorting with gangsters, who was ill or dying, who was suffering financial difficulties, which spouses were having affairs, which couples are about to divorce, and dozens of other secrets, Peccadilloes" were now right out there in public view for everybody to see. Winchell broke the taboos. He was the first to offer up the womanizing of John F. Kennedy for public delectation.

Oddly enough, Winchell's reliance on unreliable gossip made him an authoritative source, an opinion maker. He was the man on the inside. If he didn't know what people were up to, then who did? Wasn't Broadway his beat? Didn't he spend his evenings in the Stork Club chatting with J. Edgar Hoover and Joe DiMaggio?

Winchell's arrogance kept pace with his power, renown, and wealth. Ernest Cuneo was well aware that the White House connection was a temporary exploitation of Winchell's audience. When Winchell was no longer of use he would be tossed aside. After Roosevelt's death, Winchell sought a connection with President Truman. Truman was not interested. Winchell pouted and peppered his column with unflattering comments directed at Truman's presidency. Cuneo saw trouble ahead. He experimented with the Cassandra role, warning Winchell that he was set up for a fall.

The event that commenced Winchell's fall took place in Winchell's own home away from home, the Stork Club. Gabler begins the chronicle with these words:

> Though Winchell had had premonitions of his demise ever since the war's end, the long, torturous descent actually began precisely at 11:15 P.M. on October 16, 1951, in the Cub Room of the Stork Club when Josephine Baker entered.

Josephine Baker had moved from small-time American vaudeville to the Paris cabaret scene where she obtained international celebrity. On that October 16, Miss Baker arrived at the Stork Club with her husband and friends. She got the impression that she was not wanted. She was not being served. She said later that Winchell was sitting nearby and

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looked right through her. She left and informed the NAACP of her treatment. Walter Winchell's name popped up as the story was repeated and expanded and became a public controversy. Ernest Cuneo, an ardent proponent of civil rights, decided to take action to prove that Winchell wasn't culpable. Cuneo arranged a truce with respect to Winchell, who was to offer what could be interpreted as an apology and his own protest of the Stork Club's treatment of Miss Baker.

Winchell's broadcast departed from the agreement Cuneo so carefully arranged. Winchell even denied he was in the Stork Club at the time of the incident. This created a rift between Cuneo and Winchell that was never repaired.

Articles appeared criticizing Winchell for his cowardice in the Baker affair. Winchell lashed out at his accusers with allegations of communism, fascism, anti-Semitism, and racism. Miss Baker announced, through her lawyer, Arthur Garfield Hayes, that she was filing a $400,000 suit against Winchell, charging that he had embarked on a public campaign to defame her. She followed through and filed the lawsuit. Those who had feared Winchell because of the power of his column now joined the attack. Contracts were canceled, defamatory articles appeared. Other lawsuits followed.

Lawsuits often appear as the stigmata identifying an advanced stage of paranoia. Lawsuits organize the sense of persecution into pleadings, motions, deadlines, and court appearances. The accusations, the countercharges, the meetings with lawyers, and the depositions bring a high pitch of excitement. Documents are assembled proving that the adversaries' allegations are fabrications. Small victories are celebrated. Disappointments in court must be avenged by yet more discovery of documents and more depositions.

Winchell as litigant took to carrying a briefcase that was soon too small to hold all the needed litigation documents. They bulged out at the corners, disclosing letters and with each letter its envelope attached. Always the envelopes attached: the envelope is preserved to prove that the letter was actually sent, to prove who sent it, and to prove when it was postmarked. The preservation of envelopes is the distinguishing mark of *la folie de petits papiers*, the madness of the small papers.

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In his litigation phase, Winchell was not surprised at the disloyalty of those he needed as witnesses. Human nature taught him to expect disloyalty. This may explain his joining up with those who would not disappoint—people so tarnished to begin with that they were tarnishproof, such specimens as Roy Cohn and Joseph McCarthy.

In time, Walter Winchell lost his column, his friends, and his identity. Gabler defines Winchell's life as a tragedy, and sees him as a man consumed with himself, vindictive and cruel.

Gabler anticipates the reader's primary question, which is why Gabler would devote so many pages to such a man. Gabler answers the question by stating that few lives are more instructive of the forces that shaped mass culture in America than Walter Winchell's.

Because he changed American journalism, examining his life enables us to understand better the evolution of the media in this century. Because he both effected and symbolized the changing of the cultural guard in this century, examining his life enables us to understand better the challenge that mass culture issued to

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high culture in America. Because he helped create a culture of celebrity, examining his life enables us to understand better the symbiotic relationship between the public and the famous. And because he lived the cycle of celebrity himself, examining his life enables us to understand better the mechanism by which one achieves fame and loses it, the things one gains by being famous and the things one sacrifices.

If Winchell were available for an interview about Mr. Gabler's biography, what might he say? He would certainly endorse Gabler's statements about the reach of Winchell's own influence. He could point to *People Magazine* and the grocery checkout counter publications as knockoffs of his column. He might assert he is responsible for the speed with which celebrity is manufactured, then defiled into notoriety, and then trashed—all in the space of thirty days. Winchell's sense of urgency, of the apocalyptic, is the pervasive style of today's media, including the wise-looking anchorman.

Winchell can also claim he is the originator of talk radio. His Sunday night program was personal, opinionated, and reckless in its distortion of the news. It was news as entertainment. When Winchell was challenged, he pointed to the First Amendment, which forbids laws restricting freedom of speech. It remains the defense of those who are under attack as smut peddlers. The hypocrisy of the defense is self-evident. The smut peddlers wish to confuse what they are doing with a commerce in ideas. *Playboy*'s strategy is to run an occasional article by a First Amendment authority advocating the importance of that sacred, hallowed principle, the freedom of the press and Milton's plea in favor of letting truth grapple with falsehood. For myself, I have always found it difficult to adjust from the *Playboy* pictures to the pretentious legal scholarship solemnly set forth in the article. If the peddlers were honest concerning what they were up to, they would say, up front, that there is money to be made by exploiting freedom of the press. No need to prattle on about yelling fire in a crowded theater.

In my talks with Ernest Cuneo, he said that envy played a part in Winchell's equation of gossip, power, and the culture of celebrity. Winchell's gossip dealt with the lives of the materially fortunate. Winchell supplied the proof that the fortunate are as lewd and base as the common man. Winchell felt instinctively that the common man experiences pain at the good fortune of others. That pain can be assuaged by bringing him news that fate knows how to deal with those who climb too high. Ernest drew on his knowledge of the classics in pointing out that the ancient Greeks believed that the envious themselves had a mysterious way of harming those whom they envied. He said that such a belief is a constituent element even today in Mediterranean peasant villages. A mysterious ray capable of producing the harm passes from the eye of the envious to the subject of the envy. It may be an involuntary transaction. Ernest's lecture included the comment that the Latin word for *envy* is *invidere*, from "to see," and thus the derivation of the evil eye. Cuneo did not rule out peasant wisdom concerning the *malòcchio* as a contributing factor in Winchell's decline and fall. The culprit who delivered the fatal stare may have been someone as insignificant as a Stork Club waiter consumed by envy at the sight of Winchell, Roy Cohn, Joe McCarthy, and J. Edgar enjoying champagne at table 52.

A Last Valentine

THE AGE OF EXTREMES: A HISTORY OF THE WORLD, 1914–1991. *By Eric Hobsbawm. Pantheon. $30.*

Reviewed by GEORGE SZAMUELY

The British Marxist historian, E. J. Hobsbawm, has consistently avoided the comforting solace of illusion. A distinguished historian of labor, he is also the author of a three-volume history of the nineteenth century. He has now added a history of the twentieth century, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991.* Throughout almost all of his professional life, Hobsbawm has been a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. It was a burden that many intellectuals had found too onerous to shoulder. Some could not take the Nazi-Soviet Pact; others, Khrushchev's "revelations"; others, the sup-

✪ GEORGE SZAMUELY's account of intellectuals in the Cold War will be published by Simon & Schuster shortly.

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pression of the 1956 Hungarian uprising; others still, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. But Hobsbawm stuck by his comrades through thick and thin, in good times and in bad. It should come as no surprise, then, to readers of this volume that nothing that has happened in the last few years has caused Hobsbawm to revise his views. There is still very little to be said for capitalism; and the imperative to establish socialism remains as strong today as it has ever been.

Hobsbawm demonstrated his tough-mindedness in an interview he gave to BBC television last year. Asked to justify his membership in the Communist Party, he replied: "In a period in which, as you might say, mass murder and mass suffering are absolutely universal, the chance of a new world being born in great suffering would still have been worth backing. Now the point is, looking back as an historian, I would say that the sacrifices made by the Russian people were probably only marginally worth while. . . . But I'm looking back at it now and I'm saying that because it turns out that the Soviet Union was not the beginning of the world revolution. Had it been, I'm not sure. After all, do people now say we shouldn't have had World War Two, because more people died in World War Two than died in Stalin's Terror?" The interviewer then suggested: "What that comes down to is saying that had the radiant tomorrow actually been created, the loss of fifteen, twenty million people might have been justified?" To which Hobsbawm, predictable as ever, immediately replied: "Yes."

To understand what goes on in an insane asylum we do not normally consult the inmates. Therefore, it may not be such a good idea to seek an account of the lunacy of the twentieth century from someone who insists on perpetuating the lunacy. Nonetheless, Hobsbawm's book is worth reading, if only for its being as forceful a justification as we are ever going to get of a lifelong commitment to a cause that was so profligate with human lives. The book's tone is defensive but no one after reading it can remain sanguine about the end of revolutionary utopianism following the fall of socialism.

Hobsbawm was not always so defensive. During the twenty-five or so years he was writing his history of the nineteenth century, the Communist world not only showed no signs of

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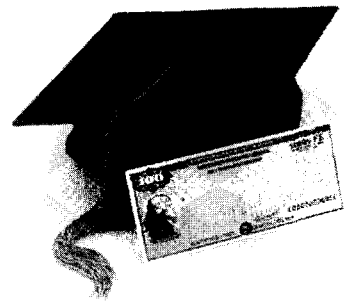

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collapsing, it seemed to pose a real threat to the survival of the capitalist world. Capitalism had shown itself to be a fragile entity—just as Marx had foreseen. True, he had got everything else wrong, but his followers could at least take comfort from his having a not much worse record than other nineteenth-century savants. Time and again, Hobsbawm would delight in pointing out how ludicrously misplaced the optimism of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie had turned out to be. He revealed his feelings most succinctly in the introduction to *The Age of Capital,* the second volume of the trilogy: "The author of this book cannot conceal a certain distaste, perhaps a certain contempt, for the age with which it deals, though one mitigated by admiration for its titanic material achievements. . . . He does not share the nostalgic longing for the certainty, the self-confidence, of the mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois world."

Today, of course, Marx looks in worse shape than John Stuart Mill or G. W. F. Hegel. The values that animated the institutions created in the nineteenth century have proved to be more enduring than those of the movements that challenged them. The self-confidence of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie may still seem misplaced, but at least its age has become a source of inspiration in many parts of the world. The Speaker of the House talks admiringly of Victorian morality; the nations of Central Europe talk of reviving a variant of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. No one, meanwhile, talks of reviving socialism. Capitalism, after one or two nasty setbacks, has proven to be rather resilient after all. Can one argue otherwise and still be taken seriously? Apparently so. *The Age of Extremes* has received nothing but the most respectful reviews on both sides of the Atlantic.

Yet few reviewers took the trouble to assess how compelling Hobsbawm's arguments really are. He surely faces insurmountable intellectual difficulties, even if he did not also have to defend a long record of supporting the Soviet "road to socialism." At a minimum, he would have to make a very convincing case for at least all of the following: that the crises of capitalism are as acute today as ever; that the history of the Soviet Union, not to mention its ignominious collapse, says nothing about the possibility and the desirability of socialism; that the world that existed before 1989 was much preferable to the one that came to be after 1989; and that the world today is much the better for the Soviet Union once having been a part of it than it would otherwise be.

Hobsbawm tries hard, but in the end—not surprisingly perhaps—it is the challenge of meeting the last requirement that absorbs most of his energies. The extravagance of his claims sounds so unusual today that their elaboration comprise the most fascinating parts of this book. These pages may be our last chance to revel in the Soviet Union's wondrous feats. It pioneered economic planning. It helped industrialize the Third World. It saved the world from Fascism. And it saved capitalism from itself: "It is one of the ironies of this strange century that the most lasting results of the October revolution, whose object was the global overthrow of capitalism, was to save its antagonist, both in war and peace—that is to say, by providing it with the incentive, fear, to reform itself . . . and, by establishing the popularity of economic planning, furnishing it with some of the procedures for its reform."

As Hobsbawm warms to his theme, he becomes almost lyrical in his descriptions of the Stalinist era. To him the Soviet experiment continues to be a shining beacon and an inspiration: "The transformation of a largely illiterate country into the modern USSR was, by any standards, a towering achievement. And for millions from the villages to whom, even in the harshest of times, Soviet development meant the opening of new horizons, the escape from darkness and ignorance to the city, light and progress, not to mention personal advancement and careers, the case for the new society was entirely convincing." Hobsbawm casually acknowledges that the "experiment" had its victims, but he wastes very little time on sympathy for them.

The effect of the Soviet Union on the rest of the world was also wholly beneficial. It kept alive the hope of revolution. It enabled the oppressed to dream of their liberation. Who else was ready to take up arms on behalf of the "wretched of the earth"? Interestingly, in his ecstatic accounts of Communist heroics, Hobsbawm often confirms the diagnoses of the Cold Warriors. For instance: "Until the end Soviet Russia remained . . . something more than just another great power. Universal emancipation, the construction of a better al-

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ternative to capitalist society was, after all, its fundamental reason for existence. Why else should hard-faced Moscow bureaucrats have continued to finance and arm the guerrillas of the communist-allied African National Congress whose chances of overthrowing the *apartheid* system of South Africa seemed and were minimal for decades?" In other words, Soviet foreign policy was not exclusively shaped by considerations of national interest. Confirmed anti-Communists used to say the same thing; only their observations were dismissed as Manichean simplemindedness. Perhaps the Soviet Union did not create all the troubles in the world, but it sure knew how best to exploit them.

Yet if the Soviet Union and the revolutionary movements that it inspired were bent on overthrowing capitalism, was it so surprising that the world's major powers should have banded together to thwart them? Yet Hobsbawm misses few opportunities to level bitter accusations against the United States for its belligerent anti-Soviet foreign policy. Writing of the origins of the Cold War, he declares: "While the USA was worried about the danger of a possible Soviet world supremacy some time in the future, Moscow was worried about the actual hegemony of the USA now, over all the parts of the globe not occupied by the Red Army. It would not take much to turn an exhausted and impoverished USSR into yet another client region of the US economy. . . . Intransigence was the logical tactic."

Is any of this even remotely convincing? Ten years ago, perhaps it might have been. So long as the Soviet bloc was still on its feet, then, if nothing else, Communism had at least demonstrated its endurance. If Stalinism was only about the application of enormous coercion to squeeze extraordinary feats out of people, then as a form of governance it was hardly a striking innovation. Had it succeeded in continuing to squeeze extraordinary feats out of people, whether with the application of enormous coercion or without, then its achievements would indeed have been worthy of a historian's awe. But the coercion proved to be a one-shot deal. Once the Soviet leaders lost the stomach for it, the feats grew less and less extraordinary. Soon the Soviet Union was in terminal decline.

Hobsbawm's attempt to show that socialism's antagonist is today in as bad a shape as socialism comprises the least interesting pages of his book. He contributes little that is new other than giving vent to his longstanding obsession with something called Kondratiev's Long Waves. According to the Russian economist Kondratiev, turbulence was to be expected every fifty or sixty years or so. This is a variation on the old Marxist "crises of capitalism." At some point, however briefly, it is bound to seem right. No one really knows what causes recessions in the capitalist economy. The one in 1990–91 was milder than the one in 1981–82, which, in turn, was milder than the one in 1974–75. But so what? There will continue to be recessions. And if any Marxists remain, they will, doubtless, go on expecting the arrival of the really big one—sometime.

Hobsbawm is no more convincing when he lists the woes of the post-1989 world. "The collapse of the communist regimes . . . not only produced an enormous zone of political uncertainty, instability, chaos and civil war, but also destroyed the international system that had stabilized international relations for some forty years. It also revealed the precariousness

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of the domestic political systems that had essentially rested on that stability." As if that were not enough, the peoples of the formerly Communist countries were having the notions of the "free-market ideologists" forced on them. Instability is a relative thing, of course. It all depends on what you take to be stability. But by no stretch of the imagination could the Eastern Europe of the years before 1989—which saw at least six major revolts against Communist rule—be described as stable.

Finally, what of the socialist imperative? Hobsbawm declares: "The failure of Soviet socialism does not reflect on the possibility of other kinds of socialism. Indeed, the very inability of the dead-end economy of Soviet-type central command-planning to reform itself into 'market socialism,' as it wanted to, demonstrates the gap between the two kinds of development."

Coming after such a spirited defense of the Soviet experience, Hobsbawm is surely now being disingenuous. What was Stalinism other than an enactment of the classical socialist program? The State took over responsibility for production, labor, distribution, exchange—for all economic activity, in fact. This was what Marx had looked forward to. As had the socialists of the Second International until 1917. It was only when its consequences became apparent to them that such leading lights as Kautsky and Bernstein determined that democracy must come first, and only then socialism. But Marx had made no such determination. Nor had Lenin. Nor Stalin. Nor any of their international followers. What they wanted was socialism. The questions of democracy could be sorted out later. That is why the Soviet Union was the object of veneration for so long. That is why, however critical the Trotskyists might have been, they continued to insist on calling it a "workers' state." And that is why Hobsbawm defends its legacy to this day.

Nor will it do for Hobsbawm to evade issues by going back to the Bolsheviks' original hope that by seizing power they would help ignite revolution in Germany and then in the rest of the world: "Looking back we can see that the original justification for the decision to establish socialist power in Russia disappeared when 'proletarian revolution' failed to conquer Germany." But suppose that it had done so? Would German Communist rule have been any better than Bolshevik? Would Bolshevik rule have been more benign? Would it have been more "socialist"? Would it have resulted in a more peaceful world? Why didn't Hobsbawm or any other Communist for that matter regard failure in Germany as inevitably vitiating the possibility of "socialism in one country"? Could it be that it never occurred to them that there was something "unsocialist" about what the Soviet Union was doing?

In the end, there is and has always been only one socialist program. As its incompatibility with democracy became apparent, its adherents were to go in different directions. The true believers among them ended up defending the Soviet Union; those who preferred to put their trust in democracy ended up building the modern social democracies. But democracy was the crucial dividing issue. And no amount of waffling from Eric Hobsbawm about the influence of the Soviet planning model on the social democracies must be allowed to obscure it. *The Age of Extremes* reads like one last valentine to socialism. As a history of the twentieth century, it is highly unreliable. But chief among its strengths is the glimpse it offers us of how formidable and pitiless the Communists were.

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The Reader Replies

Is Racism a Western Idea?

I was not reassured by Dinesh D'Souza's conclusion that because he has found that racism had a beginning, it will have an end in his article "Is Racism a Western Idea?" (Autumn 1995). That proposition has neither logical nor empirical authority.

Furthermore, D'Souza manifests a naivete that has little charm in a person who purports to analyze one of the most pressing problems in America. For him to say that Kant and Hume—because they were enlightened—could not have fallen prey to irrational notions about black people and that therefore their apparently racist notions weren't racist at all, but were rational attempts to make sense of cultural differences, is at best sophistry.

Not emphasized in D'Souza's AMERICAN SCHOLAR article was his contention, which appeared in his article in *Forbes* magazine, that much of what is called racism in America is formally similar to the noble attempts by Kant and Hume; that is, people don't understand why black people function as they do in schools and society and try to make sense of it in the same way that Kant and Hume did. That he then concludes that affirmative action programs are wrong (because they are based on the belief that racism is the cause of economic and social distress in the black community) also does not appear in the SCHOLAR article. But in fairness to D'Souza, both articles argue the same main point: racism is not the cause of dysfunctional behaviors among black Americans but the result of well-meaning, generally enlightened, Caucasian people's trying to make sense of the failure of black people to have become full partners in the American ethos.

How does D'Souza explain this failure? Why, it's simple. American black people come from uncivilized backgrounds (long before American slavery), having missed out on the influences of the great Muslim civilizations, the influences of India via the Arab civilizations, and—lest anyone think there might be a racist tint to this explanation—the great black Christian civilization of Ethiopia. (Why there was no mention of the black Hebrew civilization in Ethiopia is another question, since it was surely as ancient as the Christian one.)

There is little doubt that D'Souza will find an appreciative audience—as well as a hostile one. Within a few days of one another, his article appeared in the SCHOLAR, his article and one about him appeared in *Forbes*, and he appeared on NBC's *Today* show.

Move over, Charles Murray.

ROBERT BARASCH
Plainfield, Vermont

Oops! There goes another turncoat "scholar."

Dinesh D'Souza has finally revealed his true color. After years of presenting himself as a conservative, at Dartmouth and in the District of Columbia, he writes an essay ("Is Racism a Western Idea?") that excuses all racism practiced by non-whites as ethnocentrism or mere tribalism.

His sources are black academics with a vested interest in revising history. But Mr. D'Souza doesn't stop there. He goes on to tell us that only Western Civilization is racist, because—guess what—it's white. And who is his ultimate source? The discredited J. A. de Gobineau!

CONSTANCE FEELEY
New York, New York

I enjoyed reading Dinesh D'Souza's essay on the origins of racism, in the Autumn 1995 AMERICAN SCHOLAR, but I strongly disagree with his main argument. D'Souza's distinction between "European racism" and what he describes as traditional tribalism and ethnocentrism (p. 522)—the former emphasizing biological differences, and the latter emphasizing environmental differences—is moot; European racism, tribalism, and ethnocentrism are all ways of distinguishing "us" from "the other," the supposedly superior from the supposedly inferior. Certainly history demonstrates that the end result of each of these efforts to categorize human beings is equally tragic.

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If D'Souza really wants to see an end to racism, he should reconsider the validity of the entire notion of "race," a term that has been defined for us by nineteenth-century Europeans and remains so alluring for the reason that it so neatly categorizes people, categorization, as Jacob Bronowski argued, being the result of our compulsive but insuperable pursuit of perfect knowledge, the eradication of uncertainty. D'Souza can point out the folly of the Nazis' belief that Jews were a different "race" than so-called aryans. Yet what is important is that the Nazis believed that Jews were inferior, just as it is perhaps incredible that most Americans believe that they can, or should, categorize themselves on a census form as belonging to "one of the following groups."

Into what category would D'Souza place himself? To what race do most Brazilians belong, Brazil being famous for the wide range of skin color among its people caused by centuries of intermarriage between "races"? To what "race" belongs a person who had a grandfather who was a Cherokee, another grandfather who was Irish, a grandmother who was Polish, and another grandmother who was Moroccan? Does ancestry that can be shown to be 3 percent African make a person black, as Louisiana law dictated until 1983?

As the world's population grows and physically interacts more often, increasingly allowing for cross-fertilization of genes, the idea of trying to distinguish "races" becomes more problematic. Already, most biologists recognize the absurdity of trying to categorize individuals whose biological traits cannot be replicated in nature.

And yet even brilliant minds like D'Souza's buy into the notion that we can, and should, generalize about peoples' biological makeups. He describes the people of India as belonging to the same race (p. 520). Yet if European "tribes" eventually came to discern biological differences between "aryans" and "anglo-saxons," how long might it be before Indians (perhaps Indian intellectuals) suggest that there is a biological basis for the caste system? (And, by the way, most Indians would privately admit that skin color does play a significant role in Indian society.)

Accepting the implausibility of categorizing human beings on the basis of their biology is the surest way to end racism. Once we have accomplished that, then perhaps we can also learn to stop categorizing and persecuting people on the basis of more traditional barometers such as religion and culture.

TOM LAMONT
St. George's School
Newport, Rhode Island

DINESH D'SOUZA replies: I do not say that because racism had a beginning, therefore it surely will have an end. Rather, my point is that if racism is not a permanent or universal feature of the human psyche, then we are not condemned to live with racism and can ask what steps should be taken to eradicate it.

The old racists argued that cultures could be ranked hierarchically, and that this ranking was due to biology. Liberalism has, for the better part of a century, embraced cultural relativism, which denies that some cultures are superior to others. I admit that in a functional sense, some cultural strategies work better than others, but I deny that this is due to innate or biological characteristics. I believe that by severing the link between race and culture, anti-racism can establish itself on a stronger foundation.

In my book *The End of Racism* (although not in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR article) I do mention the ancient civilization of Ethiopia. My point is not—as Robert Barasch charges—that blacks have been culturally isolated for centuries; rather, it is that, within the last few decades, there has been a cultural breakdown in the black community, resulting in extremely high rates of crime and illegitimacy, and that these behaviors strengthen racism by giving it an empirical foundation.

Since these problems did not exist a few decades ago, they are manifestly not due to genes—the black gene pool has not changed substantially. Nor are they obviously due to white racism, which a generation ago was far worse and yet black rates of crime and family breakdown were much lower.

Constance Feeley seems disturbed at my conclusion that racism is not universal but Western in origin; this, in her view, excuses all excesses practiced by non-whites. Not so: mutual hostilities between Hindus and Muslims are surely not "racist" conflicts, yet they can take a horrible human toll. Moreover, I have a chapter in *The End of Racism* called "Bigotry in Black and White" in which I show that today racism comes in all colors. Nowhere do I rely on "black academics with a vested interest in revising history."

I am sympathetic to virtually all that Tom Lamont says in his letter. The concept of race is increasingly problematic in an era where racial lines are becoming blurred through intermarriage. Even historically, anthropologists have disagreed on where to draw clear boundaries between groups. Yet biological differences between groups do exist, and some form of scholarly classification is inevitable. I do not believe that these classifications should be the basis for government policy or preference.

Ethnocentrism—the mentality of "us" and

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"them"—can be moderated but not eliminated. We are always going to prefer our family to our neighbors, our neighbors to strangers, our team over their team, our country over other countries. Perhaps the best we can do is to adopt a very Western philosophy, which is to qualify these allegiances by subjecting ourselves and our own mores to criticism, even as we are open to learning from others.

Adventures in Wonderland

Diane Ravitch's acknowledgement of failure as a public servant, "Adventures in Wonderland: A Scholar in Washington" from the Autumn 1995 issue, could have been written by dozens of individuals who believed their scholarly credentials and experience in the academic world prepared them for successfully managing complex federal programs and motivating career employees. Apparently, Miss Ravitch actually believed her intuitive sense and "outsider's perspective" gave her considerable advantages over careerists who "believe they are smarter than everyone outside the beltway." And, after expressing her dubious views about the proclivities of too many career staffers, Miss Ravitch submits that some of her best friends are those with whom she met and worked in the federal bureaucracy.

Most surprising is the fact that Ravitch entered the government so well prepared and with a unique understanding of federal education policy while describing her experience as an innocent in the federal policymaking arena. Her story of federal aid for educational research and development seems to begin with her being sworn in by Vice President Quayle and end with the election of Bill Clinton. In her article, no attention was given to the importance of leadership or to the enduring problems associated with Executive Office politics. More than two decades ago, Hugh Heclo, while at the Brookings Institution, concluded "many of the problems related to the interaction between political leadership and bureaucratic power are structural, not personal." The personal and political ambitions of her colleagues contributed to Ravitch's failure. History indicates that politicians seldom take education research and education researchers seriously.

By 1990, the national public policy debate over school reform had deteriorated considerably. Between 1992 and 1994, all education-related legislation and program budgets originating from the administration and the congress were motivated by political considerations. In such a circumstance, a political appointee should expect "no respect" from opposition party officials, or loyalty from career civil servants. Political appointees will forever live and die by the sword. It's been my experience that individuals leaving high-level governmental positions usually land on their feet; federal institutions and programs rarely recover from rotating and ineffective political leadership. As Hugh Heclo concluded: "Political executives—usually ill-prepared to deal effectively with the bureaucracy—often fail to recognize that the real power of the bureaucracy is not its capacity for disobedience or sabotage but its power to withhold services." Interestingly, only in the last sentence of her lengthy confessional does Miss Ravitch admit, in effect, "I was in a world where I did not belong."

ARTHUR D. SHEEKEY
Falls Church, Virginia

DIANE RAVITCH replies: Arthur Sheekey missed the point of my article about the eighteen months that I served in the U.S. Department of Education. It was not a critique of career civil servants, but of the institutional rigor mortis that handicaps the federal role in education as well as of the cynicism that characterizes many lobbyists and politicians. Perhaps his many years as a career civil servant in the U.S. Department of Education accounts for his unwarranted and defensive reaction.

Joseph Wood Krutch

How good to read Robert Rowley's essay on Joseph Wood Krutch in the Summer 1995 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. It is perplexing that such a fine writer has been ignored by readers and writers in the twenty-five years since his death.

Krutch is wonderful tonic for those who despair. Though you may lose hope for the world, he writes, you need not lose hope in yourself. Do not say, "I will do what everybody else does because there is no use trying to be anything but rotten in a rotten society." If necessary, be a lonely candle which can throw its beams far in a darkling world. This is not only best for society but also the best and happiest course for the individual. If the world is hopeless, it is "wiser to see what one can do about oneself than to give up all hope of that also."

Krutch offers an excellent corrective for those who renounce personal integrity or personal happiness and insist that our duty is to think primarily in terms of what can be done for soci-

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ety. "I came into this world," said Thoreau, "not primarily to make it better but to live in it, be it good or bad." There is something to be said for those who do their best even though they do not see at the moment just what practical good it is going to do for the common man. After all, writes Krutch, "the medieval monk did perform a service. Neither the God he served nor the learning he preserved counted for much in the world from which he retired. But he did exemplify in himself virtues that might otherwise have ceased to exist entirely, and he did preserve learning that without him would have been lost."

Krutch never forces himself on his readers but, in his gentle way, he prods one to do one's own thinking. If philosophy is more to be caught than taught, the bait offered by Joseph Wood Krutch is most alluring.

ROBERT M. THORNTON
Fort Mitchell, Kentucky

Reflections of a Bookstore Type

Peter Schwendener's description of his bookselling experience at Barnes & Noble, "Reflections of a Bookstore Type?" (Autumn 1995) is as remote from mine as the O. J. Simpson case was atypical of most trials.

Except for an unhappy year at B. Dalton, the first "superbook" chain, I worked for thirty years in smaller, more intimate stores with many familiar customers and a fresh stream of new ones. It was not a corporate atmosphere. No cafés. This was not Evanston, Illinois, but Westwood, Beverly Hills, and Hollywood, California. Most customers seemed larger than life, not just the movie crowd but eccentrics like Anaïs Nin, Henry Miller, and Mick Jagger; brains like Thomas Mann, Aldous Huxley, and Katherine Anne Porter. While Schwendener cites "deconstructionism" as the major topic today, in the sixties and seventies we had several: the nonfiction novel, tactile art, absurdist drama, geometric poetry, ecumenical religion, existential philosophy, primatial anthropology, revisionist history, the new math, etc., reflecting the intellectual turmoil of that time.

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LAWRENCE LOWREY
Santa Monica, California

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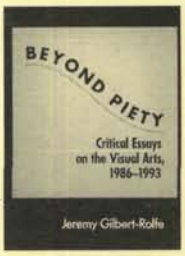

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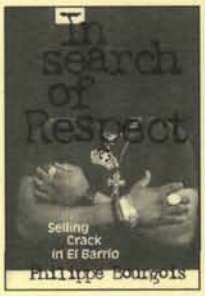

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